6-1-1963

EE Cummings: Twentieth century gadfly

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E. E. CUMMINGS: TWENTIETH CENTURY GADFLY

by

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master Of Arts

June 1963

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Preface

Particularly significant in an age of mechanization, automation, and conformity is the existence of a man who continued to maintain his own integrity and whose growth and continuing self-discovery are revealed and expressed in his poems. In this, the year following his death, E. E. Cummings, individual, through his writing may serve as a beacon and an inspiration to those who are caught in a stultifying conformity which attempts to erase every aspect of individual differences.

Cummings' growth as a man and an artist may be traced through the developing phases of his techniques--his style, his use of diction, his syntactical arrangements--as well as his attitudes. All these characteristics of his writing set him apart as a unique individual with his own particular way of looking at life.

This thesis makes no attempt to analyze Cummings' techniques as such. Where technique helps to carry out the theme of the particular poem, it is commented upon. The thesis has been limited to an analysis of Cummings as a social critic, primarily of the American scene, but more universally of the follies of man. He writes as a man living in the world,

not isolated from it, a man who could, nevertheless, view objectively the society of which he was a part. That he was able to see the discrepancies, the paradoxes, the gulf between the American dream and the reality is indication of the strength of his own inner vision which maintained his equilibrium in such a world.

That he could, after more than sixty years of viewing the idiosyncrasies and madness of mankind, still write of love and spring and the affirmation to be found in life is proof of his humanity and his essential belief in the importance of the dignity and decency of one individual being himself. It is also proof of his awareness and acceptance of a basic fact: the ideal is that which is ultimately and essentially the most practical and the most real. Such a statement seems paradoxical, so paradoxical that only a student of Cummings or of his New England transcendental heritage is likely to understand it.

For his initial interest and encouragement which were responsible for this individual's choice of English as a major and for his patience and help during the writing of this thesis, I give thanks to Dr. Robert D. Harper.

B.A.E.

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CHAPTER ONE

CUMMINGS: INDIVIDUAL

> "Better worlds...are born, not made; and their birthdays are the birthdays of individuals."[1]

These words proclaim a thesis which E. E. Cummings reiterated in a variety of ways throughout his long writing career. His criticism of a society which seeks to impose its values upon the individual has been expressed in terms which range from deliberate vulgarity, mocking cliches, shrill invective and white-hot anger, to witty satire. Cummings has been accused of being a sentimentalist and an anti-intellectual, but he has steadfastly insisted on maintaining his role as a gadfly, a role which was proclaimed for him in the Foreword to The Harvard Wake, in the issue dedicated to him. As "the natural gadfly to an opiated and pasteurized American public,"[2] Cummings has satirized a dead culture whose inhabitants are "unpersons"; further, he has used the patriotic, commercial, and arty cliches which abound in that culture to express his contempt for it.

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[1] E. E. Cummings, i Six Nonlectures (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 31-32.

[2] Seymour Lawrence, editor, The Harvard Wake, V (September 1946), 3.

Cummings is first of all a fierce and militant champion of the individual, of the person who lives, who is, who does not merely exist. He is critical of anything in our society which would force the individual into a mold which reduces him to the state of "un-ness," which is the condition of "mostpeople." Cummings expresses his convictions in a style which is highly individualistic--in form, in diction, in syntax. Nevertheless, in his best poems, his techniques are subordinated to the ideas expressed. As a social critic, Cummings attacks the sham, corruption, hypocrisy, and surge to conformity which pervades our society today. In doing this, he attacks the basic philosophy of our whole economic structure. Instead of religion, science, he says, now promulgates the dogmas by which we live; and science has made man into a machine. He sees the stress on materialism evident in coercive business and advertising techniques, in growing officialdom, in the dehumanization of the individual. Cummings also attacks war, but even here, his chief criticism is of its effect on the individual and the loss of his identity which results from petty bureaucracy, the brutality and stupidity of officials, and a horrifying indifference to mass as well as individual death.

But Cummings is by no means solely negative. Despite the wide range of his attacks and his sometimes shotgun approach, particularly in his early period, he is also a poet

of affirmation. It is only when individuals are true to themselves, he says, when they celebrate life and love, that they escape being "mostpeople" and become wonderingly and wondrously alive. It is for his lyrics of affirmation that Cummings will probably be best remembered, for they have a fresh, vital quality which reveals what David Burns describes as "the shocked, bug-eyed wonder of the first man on his first day...."[3]

In contrast, as a gadfly, Cummings points out all that is debilitating and mechanistic in our society; its result has been a dearth of love and individuality. With the same intensity that he attacks what he considers to be evil, he affirms the worth of the individual: "We are human beings; for whom birth is a supremely welcome mystery, the mystery of growing: the mystery which happens only and whenever we are faithful to ourselves."[4]

Cummings writes in the tradition of Thoreau, who also set himself against the currents of American thought; he re-affirms much, too, from the Emersonian tradition, with its insistence on self-reliance and individual conscience. These particular New England and Transcendentalist traditions were

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[3]David Burns, "Antique Virtues in Modern Dress," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVII(December 18, 1954), 11.

[4]E. E. Cummings, "Introduction to Collected Poems," Poems 1923-1954 (New York, 1954), p. 331.

inevitably transmitted to Cummings as a result of his birth and upbringing in Cambridge and in the religious heritage of his father, a Unitarian minister, a man "who had created his Unitarianism (his father being a Christian of the hellfire variety)."[5] Cummings' father was a man of many talents and much resourcefulness, and he trained his children in the same tradition. Their home was a sanctum, a place for privacy, qualities which Cummings averred in the first of his six non-lectures no longer obtain in a world where mobility and restless activity have disrupted family life. The love and respect which Cummings had for his parents is in sharp contrast to what one often reads about many artists, and two of Cummings' most beautiful lyrics are warm affirmations of his feelings for his father and mother.

One feels sure, however, that a rebel like Cummings could not and would not accept all his parents' values, and that despite the affection between them, he would by his very nature seek to establish his own values. This fact is attested to by Matthew Josephson who writes, "Nevertheless, though the Reverend Mr. Cummings admired and aided his son, there were often rather heated arguments between them, because e.e. was certainly in full rebellion against the family values and especially his father's puritan-Unitarian authority."[6]

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[5] Six Nonlectures, p. 12.

[6] Matthew Josephson, Life Among the Surrealists (New York, 1962), p. 93.

It is interesting to observe that the philosophy of religious freedom of the individual, which is stressed in Unitarianism, was combined in the Reverend Mr. Cummings with chairmanship of the Watch and Ward Society of Boston, and thus this exponent of self-reliance was in league with Anthony Comstock and all he represented. One can only speculate on the reaction of the elder Cummings to those of his son's poems, particularly his early ones, which celebrate with vivid intensity the pleasures of the flesh.

Cummings contributed his poetry to the Harvard Monthly and the Harvard Advocate until he graduated with his Master's degree in 1916. He then took a job with Colliers, but fired himself after three months. He learned what having a job meant, and how it felt to earn his living in a country "where nothing outranks the almighty dollar."[7] Labor, which should be a miracle, had degenerated under the absurd American system to something quite different:

> Labor means this--ever so many people do what they don't want to do in order to be compensated for the loss of their self-respect. I refer to money. In other words, a laborer gets paid for doing it whereas a slave does it freely.[8]

The similarity to Thoreau's ideas is striking.

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[7] Charles Norman, The Magic-Maker: E. E. Cummings (New York, 1958), p. 73.

[8] Ibid., p. 328. This is from a conversation of Cummings with Norman.

America by the spring of 1917 was on the verge of entering the war, and Cummings, due soon to be called up for army service, volunteered for the Harjes-Norton Ambulance Corps, which served in France. Among the Harvard contingent who volunteered for service in the Ambulance Corps in France or with Red Cross units in Italy in addition to Cummings, were Malcolm Cowley, John Dos Passos, Robert Hillyer, and Roger Sessions. Columbia men included William Slater Brown and Louis Bromfield.[9] Malcolm Cowley also lists Hemingway, Julian Green, William Seabrook, and Harry Crosby, and reflects that the Ambulance Corps and French military transport were courses which taught the men "...courage, extravagance, fatalism, these being the virtues of men at war; they taught us to regard as vices the civilian virtues of thrift, caution and sobriety; they made us fear boredom more than death."[10]

As for his attitude toward the war, Cummings himself reports that "Being neither warrior nor conscientious objector, saint or hero, I embarked for France as an ambulance driver."[11] A number of the volunteers were at heart pacifists and of humanitarian impulse. Most of them were excellent university men who volunteered as drivers and in

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[9]Josephson, p. 56.

[10]Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return (New York, 1951), p. 38.

[11]Six Nonlectures, p. 32.

addition could speak French.

> Slater Brown, for example, at age sixteen had been a member of a little sect of Christian Socialists, and used to pass out leaflets in the street calling people to the Church of the Social Revolution, presided over by the Reverend Bouck White, a radical orator and writer.[12]

It was Cummings' friendship with Slater Brown which led, three months later, to his incarceration in a French prison camp. Brown appears to have been indiscreet in letter writing in war time; both Cummings and Brown had been guilty of fraternizing with the Frenchmen attached to the unit. Brown was sentenced to prison; Cummings would have gone free had he told his questioners that he hated the Germans. He refused to say this, averring instead that he loved the French; he, too, was sent to prison. The Enormous Room is the re-enactment of Cummings' experiences as a prisoner of war at La Ferté Macé. He was held here for three months, until American officials could obtain his release as well as Brown's. In vividness of diction and imagery so striking that one gags at the stench and sights evoked, Cummings describes the medieval treatment of those suspected of espionage who had become the victims of the hysteria that war breeds and of the absolute indifference toward individuals of a bureaucratic officialdom. The book serves as

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[12] Josephson, p. 56.

a prelude to Cummings' later writing, for in it one sees his basic attitudes, philosophy, use of diction, and the rudiments of his later style:

> For who was eligible to La Ferte? Anyone whom the police could find in the lovely country of France (a) who was not guilty of treason, (b) who could not prove that he was not guilty of treason. By treason I refer to any little annoying habits of independent thought or action which en temps de guerre are put in a hole and covered over, with the somewhat naive idea that from their cadavers violets will grow whereof the perfume will delight all good men and true and make such worthy citizens forget their sorrows.[13]

After his release and the cessation of hostilities, Cummings became an expatriate, together with a great many other Americans who felt that America was a cultural desert, and that Europe, and particularly Paris, was a much more appreciative and rewarding home for the artist. He arrived in Paris in 1921, and it was probably inevitable that he would be attracted to the Dada movement. Dada was the extreme in individualism, for it proclaimed that there was no psychic basis common to all humanity; there was no law to which all were subject; there was no sure means of communication between one man and another. "Art is a private matter; the artist does it for himself; any work of art that can be understood is the product of a journalist."[14] In order to understand

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[13] E. E. Cummings, The Enormous Room (New York, 1934), pp. 115-116.

[14] Cowley, p. 149.

Cummings, one must be aware of the way he manipulates words:

> Cummings seemed closer than other Americans to contemporary movements in French poetry. He had a fondness (like the Dadaists and Surrealists) for juxtaposing the incongruous, and for 'words that surprise each other' on finding themselves bedfellows.[15]

Whether Dada had as much effect upon Cummings' style as some of his critics aver, or whether he was drawn to the movement because of his affinity for some of its aspects and particularly its emphasis on individuality is a matter for conjecture. Cummings' use of symbolism, particularly in his later work, is in the tradition of experimentalism which sought a sharply concrete and organically alive poetry. He may well have carried it to the ultimate with his use of punctuation and spacing; but there is more purpose and meaning in Cummings' poetry of this period than in most of the Dada work which followed the proclamation "Dada Has No Meaning."[16] The whole Dada movement, according to Wilson, might well be called Symbolist; this would encompass Dada, the Post-Impressionists, the Cubists, and the Expressionists.[17] And Norman, Cummings' biographer, points out that "Cummings is really closer to the Symbolists who, in a laudable desire to strip poetry of

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[15]Josephson, p. 158.

[16]Cowley, p. 148.

[17]Ibid., p. 141, a reference to Edmund Wilson.

verbiage, projected at length pure metaphor without connecting appliances."[18]

Cummings, however, could never be a member of any group, a fact which was made strikingly apparent during the thirties, when he was one of the few writers of the time who were not taken in by the Communist appeal. Indeed, Eimi, the report of his travels in Soviet Russia in 1931, did not endear him to the Soviet officials. Eimi is the visceral and kinesthetic response of a particularly sensitive individual to a society of "un" which engulfs all individuals in a deadly, drab, and dirty blanket of bureaucracy and collectivism.

Cummings criticized what he saw in Russia; he was also extremely critical of American life and values. Nor was he alone. The decade of the twenties was characterized by the postwar writers who were rebels in life and art. The disillusionment that followed World War I was evident in the dismay felt and evidenced by many writers and artists. They fled in revulsion to a climate where the artist was welcomed and appreciated, and where material values were not held in such high esteem:

> Few felt at home in what Tawney called the 'Acquisitive society,' the world of Mathew Josephson's 'Robber Barons,' and, ever since Edwin Arlington Robinson had said in his boyhood 'Business be damned,' writers had been repeating this over and over. Had not Brooks

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[18] Norman, p. 158.

> Adams observed that the 'principle of evil' was embodied in the 'greed and avarice of competition'? Ezra Pound was on the point of saying that the 'usurers' betrayed everything that writers cared for--those heroes of the big business world whom the muckrakers had abused and exposed and whom Waldo Frank attacked with O'Neill and Dos Passos? All these writers were in revolt against what Waldo called the 'cold lethal simplicities of American business culture,' the monstrous disproportion between business and the other concerns of life in E. E. Cummings' land of the Cluett shirt.'[19]

Josephson himself described how the Ford factories at Dearborn had made a deep impression on him. The speed of the assembly line was disconcerting; the men themselves were made machinelike:

> Would engineers and technicians be the salvation of our society, as Thorstein Veblen had once hoped they would? My own feeling was that America was becoming not only mechanized but collectivized--much like Soviet Russia, though under the program of monopoly capitalism instead of Marxist dictatorship. In the end there would perhaps be little to choose between the two systems of standardized production and distribution. The managers and the Capitalists seemed driven by their destiny.[20]

A world in which men become numbers instead of individuals is a world of abstraction. It is a world of mechanized thought, feeling, and action; in this kind of a world all elements of society are presumed to have a fixed purpose. What then, is real? George Haines points out that, particularly in his early work, Cummings turned to the primitive:

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[19]Van Wyck Brooks, Days of the Phoenix (New York, 1957), pp. 31-32.

[20]Josephson, p. 363.

"In the cheap dance hall, at the burlesque show, at the circus, he found an earthy reality uninfluenced, uninhibited, by the prevailing conventions, the antithesis to the scientific and industrial asceticism."[21] Cummings wrote with sympathy of prostitutes, outcasts, and other unconventional characters. In his early works, "Individual aspects of our society were attacked as if each existed in isolation from every other, as if each alone were a cause for exasperation."[22] As Cummings matured, his philosophy deepened with a more comprehensive analysis of the problem, and he became and has remained an uncompromising champion of the right and the need for each man to be an individual.

> Two other aspects of depersonalization appear relevant. Indifference to the good, or to the worth, of the individual as individual hastens the acceptance of collectivism, and emphasis upon the abstract in preference to the concrete lessens one's awareness of one's self as a person. In much of his poetry E. E. Cummings has opposed the individual to the state and to the mass or group.[23]

Cummings' hatred for abstraction became a part of his technique when he took abstract words and forced upon them the task of becoming concrete nouns and verbs in order to make them living and truly vital entities:

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[21]George Haines IV, "The World and E. E. Cummings," The Sewanee Review, LIX (April 1951), p. 208.

[22]Ibid., p. 210.

[23]William Van O'Connor, Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry (Chicago, 1948), p. 217.

> The poet, whose function is to make affirmations, to celebrate life, must fulfill that function by using an idiom of his own time and place. In a world of abstraction, the individual instance to gain universal significance must become itself an abstraction. Only so will it, in religious terminology, speak to or minister to our condition.[24]

In addition to employing the enemy's ammunition of abstraction, Cummings used constantly reiterated and therefore meaningless words and phrases and turned them into an effective technique for satirizing those aspects of American life which he found particularly reprehensible. He utilizes the slang, the rhythms, the cadence of American speech to blast through inertia and indifference and to shock us into more awareness of what is happening to us:

> His idiosyncratic use of language vividly conveys certain aspects of metropolitan life: the jazz tempo of winking electric signs, the blare of the loud-speaker, the streets where cars which could go sixty miles an hour move through the obstructions of traffic like ox-carts. ... The difficulty is largely one of training the eye to catch more at a glance than is customary. Some of his pieces obstinately refuse to be read aloud at all, while others can only be stammered forth. His typographic hesitations and jack-in-the-box celerities jump at the eye, leaving the ear vacant. There are occasions when he is indeed a child, the good child who should be seen and not heard, and like that small creature, silently plotting against our peace.[25]

Part of the reason for Cummings' close attention to

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Babette Deutsch, This Modern Poetry (New York, 1953), p. 212.

the look of a poem is the fact that he is also a painter and is therefore extremely conscious of the overall appearance of a poem on the page and its relationship to any other poem which is near it. The twentieth century is a visual age and Cummings realized:

> that in this age we take in more by eye than by ear. To make his rhythms felt and his words audible he called on the printers for help. Let the eye see and then the ear might listen. When he mastered this technique he could do just about anything with it he desired. He could paint a portrait, or make a mouse skitter down the page and vanish, or reproduce the pomposity of a bore who had you boxed up in a corner.[26]

In addition to this concentration on the appearance of a poem, Cummings also distorts language and syntax in an attempt to create the immediacy of an experience, the emotion and feeling involved, but his distortion also typifies an age of complexity, of distortion and chaos when old values have been thrown out, and there are no new ones to take their place. He remarks, "...we have nothing even remotely approaching culture. On the contrary, what we have is a very expensive system for compelling things to mean whatever they aren't."[27] Certainly the current stress on the image one projects, regardless of what is behind the facade, bears him out. His concern with emotion and the need first of all for

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[26] Willard Thorp, American Writing in the Twentieth Century, (Cambridge, 1960), p. 215.

[27] Norman, p. 328.

an emotional response to life is also at variance with the intellectual and scientific approach which attempts to analyze, categorize, and de-personalize everyone. He attacks with vigor the condition that Joseph Wood Krutch reported on in somber despair in his book The Modern Temper, and particularly in the chapter "The Life and Death of a Value." The stress that Cummings places on the emotional rather than the intellectual response to life has caused him to be called an adolescent romanticist who failed to mature. But, as Sherwood Anderson pointed out, "...isn't there at least a chance that the fear of emotional response to life may be as much a sign of immaturity as anything else? It does seem so to me."[28]

Cummings also believes in the individual conscience and freedom to act in accordance with this, and he refers to the belief that heredity is nothing because everything is environment as the "supersleepingpill."[29] Cummings was one of the post-World War I writers who were rebels in life and art; Cummings has remained a rebel. "To be a rebel implies faith in one's ability to do things better than those in power."[30] In order to do things better, or even to have the

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[28] Ibid., p. 340; as quoted in a letter from Van Wyck Brooks.

[29] Six Nonlectures, p. 4.

[30] Malcolm Cowley, The Literary Situation (New York, 1954), p. 37.

faith, one must have carefully thought out one's position and one's philosophy of life, whether it be related to a definite religion or not. This Cummings did and this sustained him in his role as gadfly to a public reluctant to listen to what he has been trying to tell it. In a society which is virtually traditionless, one must establish his own:

> We have suggested elsewhere that a tradition which supports a strong moral code, and a strict scale of values enables the individual to experience a sense of identity and a sense of belonging, both of which are necessary to personality. The sureness with which one believes in the rightness of his own insights and his general point of view or philosophy further strengthens his sense of identity.... The life of a person in a traditional society is circumscribed, framed as it were by ideals, attitudes, and modes of conduct. He is given a focus within the society. Thereby he achieves a greater sense of identity and thus offsets the sense of flux. In our all but traditionless society the sense of identity must come from whatever focus the individual is able to establish for himself.[31]

To exist according to slogans, to live in a machine society, to pass one's time in unfeeling acceptance of mass dictates were, to Cummings, negations of life. To be knowingly and feeling alive, to be, are affirmations of life. "If a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little--somebody who is obsessed by Making."[32]

The greatest negation of life, the thing most destructive of human values and dignity and worth is the

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[31] O'Connor, p. 215.

[32] E. E. Cummings, "Foreword to Is 5," in Poems, p. 163.

holocaust of war. For war not only destroys human life but it also creates a climate of fear and suspicion and enforced conformity to rigid standards which except no one. The application of such rules takes no cognizance of individual differences; on this ground alone, Cummings would protest the dehumanizing effects of war. His first real protest was lodged in what has been called the finest war novel, The Enormous Room.

CHAPTER TWO

ON WAR

"if the quote state unquote says
'kill' killing is an act of christian love"[1]

The Enormous Room is a book which deals largely with a by-product of the war, the prisoner-of-war camp. The book reveals the effects of suspicion that is bred by war, of the bureaucracy that springs into being and is justified as necessary for the survival of a country during wartime. It shows what happens to petty-minded men who can hold in subjugation other men and who can inflict indignities and misery upon them and their families. The physical conditions of La Ferté Macé were deplorable; yet there existed among many of its inmates a camaraderie which testified to affirmation of life even in the midst of squalor and filth. In the "Delectable Mountains"[2] (Cummings' name for those individuals

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[1] E. E. Cummings, "why must itself up every of a park," Poems 1923-1954 (New York, 1954). All poems unless otherwise specified come from Poems. Each poem is dated by its first publication as recorded in E. E. Cummings, A Bibliography, compiled by George J. Firmage (Middletown, Connecticut), 1960.

[2] The name "Delectable Mountains" comes from John Bunyan's book, Pilgrim's Progress. A number of chapters in Cummings' book are taken from names and events from this book, also. Cummings calls one chapter of the book "The Pilgrim's Progress"; for him it was a pilgrimage which affirmed the need to be an individual.

whom he particularly celebrates in his book) are seen the qualities which make a man an individual--a living, responding, human being even in the face of threats, and punishment, and utter brutality. The infractions of rules which often made little sense were punishable by solitary confinement in the cabinet, a cold, damp hole underground in which a man or a woman could freeze to death. There were numerous petty harassments which officials could impose on those interned in La Ferte. This included the separation of families. For, says Cummings ironically, "Let us also and softly, admit that it takes a good and great government to negate mercy."[3]

The Enormous Room is a passionate denunciation of unfeeling officialdom; it is an impassioned affirmation of the warmth and beauty of individuals who maintained their integrity and character despite their surroundings. The style in which the book is written is the precursor to Cummings' poetry as well as to his later book, Eimi. Alfred Kazin writes:

> The enormous room was a Black Bourse of all the war emotions. To describe this procession of horrors Cummings needed a prose that was as nervously mobile as jazz, as portentously formal as a document, and as crisp and precise as his own poetry. He developed a style as far removed from declamation as possible, but one that parodied the pompous undertones of declamation, a style that took its place and weight and diction from the unspoken resources of war cynicism. The essential character of his prose was its self-conscious originality. ... And though it scattered its effects carelessly, the motive behind it was austere:

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[3]The Enormous Room, p. 228.

> Cummings' great desire was for a prose that should be, beyond everything else, completely and inexorably true; a prose that would express, as Hemingway later said in a celebrated statement of his own purpose, 'the truth about his feelings at the moment when they exist.' It was to be a prose as ruthless, as impolite, as sharp, as consciously and even elaborately bitter, as the world it described. It was to be a prose so contemptuous of conventional standards that no one could doubt the depth of the experience behind it.[4]

Much that Kazin writes about the prose could be written about the poetry, too.

Cummings' inability to accept conventional standards and attitudes was nowhere more striking than in his refusal to express hatred toward the Germans. In the initial investigation of his activities, he had been exonerated of any blame or crime other than his having for a friend a man who wrote indiscreet letters in war time. Cummings would have been freed by the French military authorities had he answered in the affirmative this question put to him: "Est-ce-que vous detestez les boches?"

Instead he answered: "Non. J'aime beaucoup les francais."[5] He was not being dramatic; he did not refuse in order to act a martyr. Considerably later, during World War II, the statement which prefaced his contribution to The War Poets[6] again points out the paradox and irony inherent in the

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[4]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York, 1942), p. 252.

[5]The Enormous Room, p. 19.

[6]Oscar Williams, editor, The War Poets (New York, 1945), pp. 12-13.

insistence that one must hate another group of people in order to be thought a good American. Again and again he makes this point in his poetry. He also cautions against being taken in by propaganda and lies. The consistency of his attitude throughout the years shows the strength of his individualism and his stubborn refusal to be taken in by the great flow of conditioning techniques which have become so much a part of our society.

Conditioning techniques are widely used during wartime. With the exception of one poem, "Section Two" in Cummings' book Is 5 is a consideration of war; specifically it is concerned with three types or groups of people: those who are responsible for prosecuting the war, those who remain at home, and those who do the actual fighting, the common soldiers. Cummings satirically points up the contrast between the generals who run the war, most of whom appear to him to be doing so from safe positions, and the ordinary foot soldier who has to follow the commands. As usual, his rebellion against authority is whole-hearted, all-inclusive, and vitriolic. He apparently can see no good in anyone who prosecutes a war--from the unknown general who battles it out with a typewriter, to "generalissimo e"; from "the microscopic pithicoid President" who "chatters about Peacepeacepeace," to the absurd toy soldier general who postures and poses, a "mineral general animal."

Indignant moralist that he is, Cummings utilizes every opportunity to point out the hypocrisy, the absurdity, and the paradoxes of a situation in which men prate about peace and celebrate war. He sarcastically contrasts the concept of man created in God's image with what man has done to man--or animal as the case may be--for animal imagery is often utilized with striking, and Swiftian effect.

The following poem illustrates these points:

opening of the chambers close

quotes the microscopic pithicoid President
in a new frock
coat(scrambling all
up over the tribune dances crazily
& &)&
chatters about Peacepeacepeace(to
droppingly
descend amid thunderous anthropoid applause)pronounced

by the way Pay the

extremely artistic nevertobeextinguished fla
-me of the (very prettily indeed) arra-
nged souvenir of the inspite of himself fa
-mous soldier minus his na-
me (so as not to hurt the perspective of the (hei
nous thought) otherwise immaculately tabulated vicinity)invei-
gles a few mildly curious rai
-ned on people (both male and female
created He

then, And every beast of the field

(1926)

By careful division of the words and the lines, Cummings describes a President who is tiny in stature and in brain--a monkey-like person who is dressed "in a new frock." "Frock" changes to "frock/coat" but not before one

sees the image of a monkey "dancing crazily" and "scrambling all" before he scrambles "up over the tribune." Cummings develops the image of the monkey further as he pictures the President dropping down (from the trees?) "amid thunderous anthropoid applause." Peace is pronounced "Pay the" (an allusion to the reparations payments?); the recipient is to be the flame of the war memorial which commemorates the unknown soldier.[7] The soldier is nameless not to serve as a symbol, necessarily, but to avoid having any concrete data which might clutter up the otherwise beautiful, unsullied surroundings. That this insistence on neatness and order is at variance with the chaos caused by war is incidental. It is one of those curious paradoxes which "mostpeople" never notice. "Immaculately" is used in the sense of avoiding, in this case, reference to anything human, and also in a religious sense, for the final three lines are a direct quote from Genesis. The word tabulated may be a reference to the tabula rasa of John Locke with the implication that man has still not learned despite all the wars he has fought; it most certainly implies that man is more interested in data about people than he is interested in humans themselves. While the monkey figure of the President inspires thunderous applause

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[7] The reference in the poem is probably to an actual monument in Paris in which a flame has been kept burning at Le tombe de le Soldat Inconnu.

from the ape-like throng, he inveigles only a "few mildly curious" people to the memorial. The "nevertobeextinguished" flame has already in effect been rained on; and one is left with the "Beginning" and the curiously ambiguous phrasing of the Hebrews, arranged in Cummings' form:

> .....(both male and female
> created He
>
> then, And every beast of the field

The last line is added almost as an afterthought.

Another President, the Chief of the Armed Forces, gives the command to go to war; the generals obey him. The picture Cummings gives is neither inspiring nor flattering. There is an air of The Steadfast Tin Soldier together with Gilbert and Sullivan's Pirates of Penzance that hovers about the general in the following poem. In addition, the use of animal imagery emphasizes the uglier aspects of man engaged in genocide. One boots and spurs this general; one paints a scowl on him; then one winds him up and points him in the right direction:

> neither awake
> (there's your general
> yas buy gad
> nor asleep
>
> booted & spurred
> with an apish grin
> (extremely like
> but quite absurd
>
> gloved fist on hip
> & the scowl of a cannibal)
> there's your mineral
> general animal
>
> (five foot five)
> neither dead
> nor alive
> in real the rain)

(1947)

Here is a general: more absurd than an ape, for an ape does not engage in mass warfare; scowling like a cannibal, for the general, too, in effect, destroys human flesh. His lack of humanity is evidenced by his hard, mineral make-up. What started out as a general becomes in the third stanza, man in general. He has achieved the physical stature of only five foot five; his spiritual stature is nil, for he is "neither dead...nor alive"; he is "neither awake...nor asleep." Even the form and the short, rhyming lines contribute to the puppet effect. The only thing real in the poem is the rain.

Not only the generals who conduct the war, but also those who profit from war, as well as those who have paid for it with part of themselves, are considered in the poem "the season 'tis, my lovely lambs,"(1923). This poem, which begins like a child's fairy tale, does not continue long in the same vein. Cummings immediately launches into an attack on those who set themselves up as the new godhead and issue their commandments:

> the season 'tis, my lovely lambs,
>
> of Sumner Volstead Christ and Co.
> **the epoch of Mann's righteousness**
> the age of dollars and no sense.

The men who have thus allied themselves with their concept of Christ are John Sumner, defender of censorship

during the twenties,[8] Andrew John Volstead, whose act defined the percentage which constituted beverages as alcoholic, and those still highly vocal adherents of the Mann Act. These men all proceeded to impose their moral standards upon everyone; it is this aura of moralistic hypocrisy that marks "the epoch of Mann's righteousness" and makes it "the age of dollars and no sense" in which profit is the goal and the god. The poem continues and describes those

> antibolshevistic gents
> (each manufacturing word by word
> his own unrivalled brand of pyro
> -technic blurb anent the (hic)
> hero dead that gladly (sic)
> in far lands perished of unheard
> of maladies including flu)

Here one notes the cynicism of those who profit by the war effort and who mouth the twentieth century's version of Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

The poet now draws attention to the high ranking officers in the war, who,

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[8]Cummings satirizes Sumner in several of his writings. In Him, a play published in 1927, Sumner becomes John F. Rutter. In "I Confess," originally published in Vanity Fair, in January, 1926, Cummings writes under the pseudonym of John F. Rutter in the style of True Confessions magazine. In this essay, Rutter tells what was responsible for his discharge "from the Presidency of that foremost Puritan institution: the Society for the Contraception of Vice." The essay, representative of Cummings' brand of humor and love of puns, was reprinted in Miscellany, a collection of Cummings' hitherto uncollected work, edited by George J. Firmage (New York, 1958), pp. 180-183.

braving the worst, of peril heedless,
each braver than the other, each
(a typewriter within his reach)
upon his fearless derriere
sturdily seated--Colonel Needless
To Name and General You know who
a string of pretty medals drew

The satire directed at these officers whose weapons appear to be typewriters, not guns, and who are awarded "pretty" medals, is heightened by Cummings' use of capital letters and placement of the names in the lines. The names as well as the techniques are in sharp contrast with those in the following stanza:

(while messers jack james john and jim
in token of their country's love
received my dears the order of
The Artificial Arm and Limb

The harsh satire emphasizes the inequity in service and reward of the officers and the men. But even more reprehensible than the generals and the colonels who prosecute a war from relative safety, is

earth's biggest grafter, nothing less;
the Honorable Mr. (guess)
who, breathing on the ear of fate,
landed a seat in the legislat-
ure

Ironically, it is this winner who is also likely to be a representative of "Sumner Volstead Christ and Co." The ending is the direct reversal of the usual fairy tale, for evil triumphs over good; the mocking tone of the endearments scattered throughout the poem implement the satire, add to the cynicism, and emphasize the paradoxical quality of the

administration of justice in this "age of dollars and no sense."

Justification for war is found in what John Galbraith calls "wordfact." Sonnet 38 in Xaipe asks a question:

why must itself up every of a park

anus stick some quote statue unquote to
prove that a hero equals any jerk
who was afraid to dare to answer "no"?

And the answer is a cynical and a scornful one:

quote citizens unquote might otherwise
forget (to err is human; to forgive
divine) that if the quote state unquote says
"kill" killing is an act of christian love.

(1946)

This is the travesty Cummings inveighs against: the expediency of the state in using religion to further its goals and impose itself in the name of reason on mankind. The sonnet then goes on to explain the usual justification:

"Nothing" in 1944 A D

"can stand against the argument of mil
itary necessity" (generalissimo e)
and echo answers "there is no appeal

from reason"(freud)--you pays your money and
you doesn't take your choice. Ain't freedom grand

Freedom itself is made a mockery; remembering from another poem that "it's freedom from freedom the common man wants," one can see why it would be a mockery.

The language that begins the sonnet is the kind that is meant to shock one into thinking. The dramatically vulgar

opening is the prelude to a discussion of the herdlike quality of the masses, whether the "generalissimo" be American, Chinese, or Italian. "Mostpeople," like the statue, typify those who were afraid "to dare to answer 'no!'" The slang terms and the vulgarity of expression reveal the poet's concept of the level of the people, as well as the scorn he feels as he contemplates the techniques used by the leaders to persuade the people to engage themselves in war. Again the moralist, Cummings points out the use of wordfact, of rationalizing and justifying the unchristian act of killing. The argument of military necessity prevailed in 1944 in America as it had in 1917 in France, at La Ferte Mace; freedom of the individual under such conditions is a myth. One can always justify on the basis of reason what one's deepest emotions cannot possibly justify.

While Cummings inveighs against war, he does not do so merely because of its bringing the more imminent possibility of death. One of his earliest poems on war is, in some respects, like Donne's poem, "Death be not Proud."

> the bigness of cannon
> is skilful,
>
> but i have seen
> death's clever enormous voice
> which hides in a fragility
> of poppies....
>
> i say that sometimes
> on these long talkative animals
> are laid fists of huger silence.

I have seen all the silence
filled with vivid noiseless boys

at Roupy
i have seen
between barrages,

the night utter ripe unspeaking girls.

The "vivid noiseless boys" have transcended time and condition; they have overcome the immediacy of war and even the fear of death by refusing to accept them. Instead, they are engaged in living and the joys of life through the creative use of their imagination.

One can transcend death in the lull in war by holding to an image of life as one would wish it to be. In the real, or outside world, however, to refuse to acknowledge truth or reality is to allow oneself to be caught up in the ever-recurring cycles of temporary and often troubled peace, and the cataclysm of war. No matter how much religious leaders or even practical war technologists criticize the act of war and reveal its horrors, it often takes the actuality of a wound or even death to convince a man of the truth of what he has heard all his life.

plato told

him: he couldn't
believe it(jesus

told him; he
wouldn't believe
it)lao

tsze
certainly told
him, and general
(yes

mam)
sherman;
and even
(believe it
or

not)you
told him: i told
him; we told him
(he didn't believe it, no

sir)it took
a nipponized bit of
the old sixth

avenue
el; in the top of his head: to tell

him

(1944)

And thus it goes. Philosophers, religious leaders, and practical prosecutors alike have proclaimed throughout the ages that war is hell. But the greatest minds have been ignored, the warmest human sentiments have been heard without understanding or appreciation. In this poem, the credulous aspect of man in general is characterized by the colloquial quality of the speaker's comments. The oblique satire directed at the egocentricity of man possibly illustrates the

failure of great men to communicate their message to "most-people"; how could they be successful, when "mostpeople" remain unconvinced even when "you and i" tell them?

So great is our obtuseness, we even make it easy for our own destruction; for we supply the enemy, at a monetary profit to ourselves, with war material. The only thing that impresses truth upon man, therefore, is that which pierces, physically, his head.

That man has learned nothing from experience is enunciated in later poems which were written in response to World War II.[9] The cyclical characteristic of man's ignorance is exemplified in the following poem:

> all ignorance toboggans into know
> and trudges up to ignorance again:
> but winter's not forever, even snow
> melts; and if spring should spoil the game, what then?
>
> all history's a winter sport or three:
> but were it five, i'd still insist that all
> history is too small for even me;
> for you and me exceedingly too small.
>
> Swoop (shrill collective myth) into thy grave
> merely to toil the scale to shrillerness
> per every madge and mabel dick and dave
> -tomorrow is our permanent address
>
> and there they'll scarcely find us (if they do,
> we'll move away still further:into now
>
> (1944)

---

[9] Cummings' poems published in The War Poets' Anthology were the following: "it was a goodly co," "all ignorance toboggans into know," "life is more true than reason can deceive," "plato told," "my sweet old etcetera," and "i sing of Olaf glad and big."

Cummings often employs cyclical patterns in his poems; in this poem the cycle of seasons together with the cycles of man's ignorance and madness is made striking by his use of imagery which treats history in terms of a sport in which the same vehicle makes the same track down the same hill. After his fast, thrilling swoop down the hill into ignorance, the tobogganer must trudge slowly up the steep path which will take him again to ignorance. In its own way, the action might be called a modern application of the Sisyphus myth.

History, writes the poet, is too small "for me and you"; it cannot contain us, for we transcend it. Not only is it too small, it is composed of "collective myths" which swoop into the grave only to go through the same cycle of war and pestilence and disease again, each time more awful than the last. We will escape it only, says the poet, by moving to "tomorrow," for people who are caught up in the myths of the past would never think to look for alive people in "tomorrow." But if, perchance, they should stumble upon us, we can escape them by moving into "now." Now for Cummings has the intensity, the awareness, and the joy, of living. Now stands for things happening; it has the qualities of both a noun and a verb, though it is neither.

Submitting this poem in time of war is again evidence of the affirmation Cummings feels and celebrates. So long as there are some individuals, history can go on happening in

the same old worn path, and "mostpeople" will go along with it. But you and I need not.

The scarcity of individuals in the present age is cause for concern in a world gone mad with war. An earlier poem (1940) treats this problem:

> there are possibly 2 1/2 or impossibly 3
> individuals every several fat
> thousand years. Expecting more would be
> neither fantastic nor pathological but
>
> dumb. The number of times a wheel turns
> doesn't determine its roundness: if swallows tryst
> in your barn be glad; nobody ever earns
> anything, everything little looks big in a mist
>
> and if (by Him Whose blood was for us spilled)
> than all mankind something more small occurs
> or something more distorting than socalled
> civilization i'll kiss a stalinist arse
>
> in hitler's window on wednesday next at 1
> E.S.T. bring the kiddies let's all have fun

This sonnet expresses all the disgust and cynicism Cummings felt as World War II beckoned for American participation. Once again, the sloganmongers would have their day; once again glib speakers would rationalize the mis-application of the Sixth Commandment. In fact, the war could well become a form of amusement much like the bouts between the Christians and the lions. The aphorisms are expressed curtly and sardonically; the language progresses from distorted syntax to vulgarity; everything adds up to the fact that the "2 1/2 or ...3" who are individuals did not become that way by following a pattern. Man's self-importance has been magnified

in his mist of ignorance much as the mist obscures and magnifies everything out of all importance. Cummings questions whether anything exists which is smaller or more distorted than man. He compares an individual like Jesus with the insignificant creature for whom he sacrificed himself. Finally Cummings shows how closely related are the abdication of personal responsibility with the resulting totalitarian systems of government. The results are inevitable; the future obvious. Not only will we thoughtlessly and carelessly give up our rights to individual freedom and conscience, we will look on such horrors as those perpetrated by Hitler and Stalin as though they were staged for the enjoyment and entertainment of ourselves and our children. Surely there is no greater loss than our political and religious rights.

We have refused to acknowledge and appreciate the truths of our Hellenic-Hebraic heritage, and as a consequence we have thrown out on the ash-heap that which is most precious from both strains. Appreciation of beauty and the emphasis on man which is our heritage from the Greeks, and the lofty spiritual and moral inheritance from the Hebrews is sharply contrasted with the image of a drunken cleaning woman in the following poem:

La Guerre

I

earth like a tipsy
biddy with an old mop punching
underneath
conventions exposes

hidden obscenities
nudging
into neglected sentiments brings
to light dusty

heroisms
and
finally colliding with the most
expensive furniture upsets

a
crucifix which smashes into several
pieces and is hurriedly picked up and
thrown on the ash-heap

where
lies
    what was once the discobolus of

one

Myron (1925)

Only inadvertently are hidden obscenities revealed and dusty heroisms exposed to light. Of interest is the decorative function of the crucifix; it is placed near, or upon "the most expensive furniture." The latter, a symbol of materialism, survives; religion does not, and the broken pieces of the crucifix are thrown out to join the shattered and dusty pieces of the discus thrower. The two discarded symbols indicate not only the death of aesthetics and religion, but also the current position of the individual,

celebrated heretofore by both the Greeks and the Hebrews.

With the death of the individual goes the death of freedom. "La Guerre," published in 1925, came out of World War I. That human nature had not changed in the interval is evidenced in a poem which was published after the Russians had taken over Finland. "o to be in finland" begins as a bitter paraphrase of Browning's expression of love and longing for his native land in his poem, "Home Thoughts from Abroad." The contrast of the two poets in sentiment and expression is made vivid by Cummings' ugly imagery and savage attack on his country, which considers money above human life and freedom. In eight short lines, Cummings recalls the struggle for independence, the battle over slavery, and the present sated complacency of a country which, having won its own battles and grown rich, is interested only in maintaining its wealth:

> o to be in finland
> now that russia's here)
>
> swing low
> sweet ca
> rr
> y on
>
> (pass the freedoms pappy or
> uncle shylock not interested
> (1944)

The death of freedom is evidenced in what starts out as the song of the Negro slave, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," but turns into a mockery and an ugly pun. The hope for

deliverance inherent in the song changes to the actuality of the abandonment of the Finns to their enslavement; they must carry on; in addition, so far as "uncle shylock" is concerned, they are so much carrion. Because of his first-hand knowledge of the Russian collectivist system which he revealed in his book Eimi, Cummings could have had little hope that the Russians would regard the Finns as anything other than carrion, either. America, meanwhile, is symbolized, not by kindly Uncle Sam, but by uncle shylock; and America is no longer interested in Finland; for like Shylock, it is concerned only with getting its pound of flesh. After repayment of the loans by the only country which did repay its war debt, America no longer cares. Finland can lose its freedom; America values freedom so little that it passes the term freedom around as though it were a breakfast food.

The callous attitude and the shallowness of "mostpeople" is revealed again in "next to of course god america." In this poem which came out of World War I, Cummings depicts the character of a typical speaker or politician at a typical dinner before a typical group. The use of clichés and slang terms points out the lack of depth of his vision; he mouths all the traditional phrases which armchair soldiers use to prove their devotion to their country and to extol the traditional attitude expected of the soldier who is actually doing the fighting.

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

(1925)

So well known and accepted are the cliches that the speaker utters only half the phrase, knowing this will be sufficient. Complacent and safe on the home front, he attributes a different sort of blindness to those who fight the war in the mud and in the terror of shells. One can only remember Wilfred Owen's lines:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.[10]

"My sweet old etcetera" reiterates in a satiric tone what Owen as well as Cummings enunciated. What is particularly interesting is the exploration of the problem of war blindness in those people closest to the soldier himself. They, like the businessmen and the politicians, believe "the old lie"; <u>etcetera</u> stands for all the clichés about war which everyone

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[10]Wilfred Owen, <u>Poems</u> (Great Britain, 1949), p. 66.

mouths as the boys are sent off to fight.

The word <u>etcetera</u> is used in a mocking fashion first to describe Aunt Lucy, then to provide an abbreviation or shortcut in delineating various other objects and qualities. It also provides abstraction which serves as a euphemism to cover over the reality.

> my sweet old etcetera
> aunt lucy during the recent
>
> war could and what
> is more did tell you just
> what everybody was fighting
>
> for,
> my sister
> isabel created hundreds
> (and
> hundreds) of socks not to
> mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers
>
> etcetera wristers etcetera, my
> mother hoped that
>
> i would die etcetera
> bravely of course my father used
> to become hoarse talking about how it was
> a privilege and if only he
> could meanwhile my
>
> self etcetera lay quietly
> in the deep mud et
>
> cetera
> (dreaming,
> et
> cetera, of
> Your smile
> eyes knees and of your Etcetera
>
> (1926)

The traditional attitude is expressed by the typical, sweet little old lady who gives the usual answers (although

Plato, etcetera, has told us all); the typical reactions on the part of the sister is to knit for the fighting man. Not knit, but created is the word used by Cummings, however. It is an interesting word because it involves the only originality on the part of anyone in the poem, with the possible exception of the hero. It is also in telling contrast to the destruction in war; created provides a note of humor, too, for it is reminiscent of those cartoons which illustrate the good-hearted but misguided knitter and her original but non-fitting garment.

Cummings effectively brings out the irony in the contrast between what the hero's relatives assume he is feeling, and the thoughts of the hero himself. Here again, Cummings depicts the soldier transcending the depressing ugliness of his situation in a perfectly normal male way. Instead of mystically enjoying a spiritual aura of saintly joy in being a willing sacrificial victim, the hero mitigates his discomfort by day dreaming about the pleasures of the senses and the flesh. The use of capital letters on two words prove the importance of his vision.

The difference between the ideal and the reality of the established concepts is again the subject matter of the next poem, but it is far less amusing in the final analysis. The poem begins with a paraphrase of Shelley, a romantic and an idealist, from his elegy, Adonais. It proceeds to Emerson,

the transcendentalist, with a quote from his Volunteries in which the noblest sentiments are expressed:

> So high is grandeur to our dust,
> So near to God is man
> When Duty whispers low, Thou Must,
> The youth replies, I can.[11]

The irony in Cummings' poem is made stronger by the contrast between these lofty sentiments and the actual role of Cummings' youth. With the conclusion of the last stanza, however, this one short poem exemplifies in itself what Blake expressed in his contrasted Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience:

> Come gaze with me upon this dome
> of many coloured glass, and see
> his mother's pride, his father's joy
> unto whom duty whispers low
>
> "thou must!" and who replies "I can!"
> -yon clean upstanding well dressed boy
> that with his peers full oft hath quaffed
> the wine of life and found it sweet--
>
> a tear within his stern blue eye,
> upon his firm white lips a smile,
> one thought alone: to do or die
> for God for country and for Yale
>
> above his blond determined head
> the sacred flag of truth unfurled,
> in the bright heyday of his youth
> the upper class American
>
> unsullied stands, before the world:
> with manly heart and conscience free,
> upon the front steps of her home
> by the high minded pure young girl
>
> much kissed, by loving relatives
> well fed, and fully photographed
> the son of man goes forth to war
> with trumpets clap and syphillis
>
> (1926)

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[11]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Poems(Boston, 1918), p. 207.

The first line, from Shelley, is paraphrased to express sardonically the typical romantic concept of war. The tone is made satiric by the use of archaic diction and a lofty, formal level of language and philosophy. The clichés are all there, and they are phrased poetically and sentimentally. Like Shelley's "dome of many coloured glass," the lofty effect is shattered by the reality in the last line. Attitudes and phrases reminiscent of the Romantics and the Victorians comprise the parody; a special Cummings' twist is the reference to Yale, traditional rival of Harvard. The Ivy League image of "yon clean upstanding well dressed boy" offers a startling contrast to the image of disease in the last line.

Echoes of "Invictus," with its proclamation of man's ability and need to guide his own individual destiny haunt stanza four; the youth, who, in Henley's poem, is "the captain of his soul" is here pictured as standing under the shadow of the "sacred flag of truth unfurled" and seems singularly lacking in freedom of choice.

Here also is the image of the innocent sacrificial victim who is going to war because he has been told it is an honor for this "upper class American" to die "for God for country and for Yale." It is possible that by capitalizing these words only, Cummings establishes a new Trinity; the image of the sacrificial victim being offered to this new god is heightened by the line "well fed and fully photographed."

The religious connotation is carried further by the inclusion of the next line with its reference to the militancy of the Christian religion--in this case, couched in particularly war-like terms in a well known hymn:

> The Son of Man goes forth to war
> A Kingly crown to gain,
> His blood-red banner streams afar;
> Who follows in His train?

Finally, the last line of the poem explodes into the poet's expression of scorn and his disgust with the hypocrisy and ugliness of the whole affair.[12] Again and again, one notes the underlying despair as the poet compares the noble sentiments expressed by the prophets and poets of the past with the way their words have been twisted and used by leaders in business, in politics, and even in religion.

Certainly the twenties, the time of this poem's genesis, is notorious for the association of business and religion. Frederick Lewis Allen calls the association "the most significant phenomenon of the day,"[13] and goes on to relate how Bruce Barton's book, The Man Nobody Knows, a best-selling biography of Jesus, implied that Jesus was a great executive, and because of his ideal of service, was in actuality the founder of modern business; and that moreover

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[12]Quite as ugly and similar in connotation is "Where's Jack Was," 1946.

[13]Only Yesterday(New York, 1931), p. 126.

his parables were precursors to modern advertising techniques. Business appeared to have become the religion of the country.[14]

In a variety of styles and levels of language, Cummings reiterated his criticism of the way in which modern man has allowed himself to be taken in by the slogan mongers. Probably one of the ugliest poems in imagery and sound effects that Cummings has written is "F/is for foetus." It is a savage indictment of man's inhumanity to man and is couched deliberately in vulgar terms to express and expose the contempt the poet feels for the way "mostpeople" responded in "Two Minutes of Hate" fashion to the slogan-stimulus, "down with the fascist beast." Between the required responses is the dollar sign; behind the philosophy of the dollar sign is the resignation of the common man from his right and privilege of exercising his freedom to be an individual:

F is for foetus(a

punkslapping
mobsucking
gravypissing poppa but
who just couldn't help it no

matter how hard he never tried) the

great pink
superme
diocri
ty of
a hyperhypercritical D

mocra
c(sing
down with the fascist beast
boom

boom) two eyes

---

[14] Ibid., pp. 127-128.

for an eye four
teeth for a tooth
(and the wholly babble open at
blessed are the peacemuckers)

$ $ $ etc(as

the boodle'a bent is the
crowd inclined it's
freedom from freedom
the common man wants)

honey swoRkey mollypants

(1946)

The ugly characteristics of the foetus, together with its equally ugly "poppa" show what has become of the idea of democracy as a result of the abdication of its members from individual responsibility and action. In war, as in peace, the people can be led down any path which tells them it is for their comfort and material gain. This "dreadful freedom" in decision-making can be avoided; instead there will be a mass response of the "hyperhypocritical" democracy which calls the Fascist a beast, childishly adds "boom boom," and at the same time proclaims in the Old Testament spirit of vengeance with usurious overtones:

.....two eyes

for an eye four
teeth for a tooth
.....
$ $ $ etc...

The Beatitude of the New Testament has been changed and has taken on a distinctly pejorative connotation which indicates in what low regard the peacemakers are held,

together with the low sexual implications inherent in the new term, itself a euphemism. Other words which have unpleasant connotations, particularly of a sexual nature, are boodle and punk. Meanings range from slang usage to vulgarity, from archaic usage to modern.

The foetus appears to represent the ugliness, the immature attitude of a people whose scientific and material "progress" have far outdistanced their spiritual and emotional maturity. Foetus itself is an unpleasant sounding word; it implies more a state of being than a real, alive individual. And this state, inactive, apathetic, not self-directive, is indicative of the state of the mass who can be persuaded, or motivated, to hate upon command. The result is evident in the last line: the foetus never developed; it has, instead, been perverted into an effeminate, mollycoddled being, presumably male. The parody of the slogan for the Order of the Garter is now scornfully applied to those modern-day descendants who have traded nobility for a bastardized and corrupted democracy. The freedom of the individual upon which democracy must be based is despised: "it's freedom from freedom/the common man wants."

"Mostpeople" are trained to respond to the order to judge and to kill upon command. Part of the effectiveness of the training is the typical attitude that man has toward anyone who disagrees with him--he tends to apply force until

the other person does agree; this is particularly true in wartime. Sometimes the "persuader" calls his pressure "killing"; sometimes he calls it "civilizing" the antagonist. Sometimes he combines the two ideas. It is double irony for the speaker in the following poem to proclaim himself as the civilizer, first because he reveals himself as being completely ignorant and prejudiced; and second, because he is inarticulate and cannot communicate even with those who, more or less, speak his own language, let alone those whose language may be completely different. The poem, published in 1944, was written at the time when America was at war with Japan; further, the Japanese-Americans from the West Coast had been interned in the Midwest for no real cause and with no trial.

The poem "ygUduh" shows how Cummings had maintained his ability, first expressed <u>The Enormous Room</u>, of showing, with merciless clarity, the evils of negative, hate-upon-command thinking, and the authoritarian attitude which effectively disposes of individuals as individuals. The poem itself is a phonetic representation of the speaker's diction, stress, and attitude, including the snarl in the last line.

ygUduh

ydoan
yunnuhstan

ydoan o
yunnuhstan dem
yguduh ged

yunnuhstan dem doidee
yguduh ged riduh
ydoan o nudn
LISN bud LISN

dem
gud
am

lidl yelluh bas
tuds weer goin

duhSIVILEYEzum

It is particularly ironic for someone like the speaker to insist that no one other than he can "understand the goddam little yellow bastards." The slurred diction, the profanity, and the reiteration of incoherent phrases are indicative of the lack of intelligent reasoning and a clearly defined philosophy on the part of the speaker. They are responsible for his ready-made, physical solution in handling the problem. At every level of society, Cummings appears to be saying, one meets with the same ignorance and lack of individuality.

Nor is the problem of lack of understanding applicable only to those who have been proclaimed the enemy. One of Cummings' most frequently anthologized poems is "i sing of Olaf" which treats the problem of the conscientious objector.

World War II increased the awareness of the problems of the person whose religious convictions forbade his participation in the regular armed services. Herbert Hoover, a Quaker, tried to ease the lot of the man who could not, in conscience, kill a fellow human, but Hoover was opposed by the overwhelming sentiment of a country which, in the first World War, persecuted those of German extraction and changed the name of sauerkraut to "liberty cabbage." The lot of the conscientious objector was extremely difficult during World War I; it was not greatly eased during World War II. Some objectors were allowed to serve their terms in mental hospitals, in work camps, and in filling other jobs, mostly menial. Others were forced to enter the armed services.

Cummings has frankly stated that he joined the Ambulance Corps in order to avoid being drafted. It was, he says, "an opportunity to do something useful and to see France at the same time."[15] After his release from La Ferte Mace and his return home, Cummings was drafted by the army in 1918. It was during his training at Camp Devens that Cummings became acquainted with Olaf, the conscientious objector in his poem.[16] Not himself a conscientious objector, he could respect another who was obviously sincere in his attitude. It

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[15]Norman, p. 131.

[16]Ibid.

is also obvious that Cummings' recollection of officers in the armed services has not softened between 1918 and 1931, when the poem was published in ViVa.

Olaf "glad and big" is contrasted with and in conflict with "his well beloved colonel." The officiousness and brutality of those in authority ("a yearning nation's blue-eyed pride") who attempted to evoke allegiance and force conformity on Olaf through use of blunt, heated instruments, spread to the noncoms, and was in turn taken up by the "firstclassprivates" who tortured him for his refusal to do honor to the flag, the symbol of his country. The group action is emphasized by the compounding of words.

Finally, the matter being called to the attention of the President, the latter "threw the yellowsonofabitch/into a dungeon, where he died." Olaf becomes a Christ-figure, for, says the poet, "unless statistics lie he was/more brave than me: more blond than you."

Bravery appears to have different definitions. "Mostpeople" expect young men to be eager to die courageously for their country; "mostpeople" would also deny that Olaf was brave in dying for his convictions. What about the fighting man who finds himself in the midst of death and destruction? What is his reaction? What the soldiers themselves thought of the death of their buddies is revealed in the ordinary, slang-filled comments, the tenderness, and the wondering

tone of the speaker of the following poem. One might compare this speaker, also quite unlettered, with the speaker in "yuGuduh."

look at this
a 75 done
this nobody would
have believed
would they no
kidding this was my particular

pal
funny ain't
it we was
buddies
i used to

know
him lift the
poor cuss
tenderly this side up handle

with care
fragile
and send him home

to his old mother in
a nice new pine box

(collect

(1926)

The difficulty of realizing the actuality of death is apparent; it is achieved through stream-of-consciousness technique in the transition of the dead man from "buddy" to an object to be handled with care, and in Cummings' last line's jarring note, sent home to his mother in a pine box, "collect." Thus does war dehumanize the individual, be he dead or alive.

The reality of war, as opposed to the conception held

by the speaker in "next to of course god america" and several other poems, shows the anguished attempt of one soldier to communicate the horror and misery of his experience to someone else:

lis
-ten

you know what i mean when
the first guy drops you know
everybody feels sick or
when they throw in a few gas
and the oh baby shrapnel
or my feet getting dim freezing or
up to your you know what in water or
with the bugs crawling right all up
all everywhere over you all me everyone
that's been there knows what
i mean a god dammed lot of
people don't and never
never
will know,
they don't want

to
no

(1926)

It is difficult enough really to communicate with someone else, but it is virtually impossible when there is no real desire on the part of the listener to know anything which might cause him mental discomfort, however momentary. The speaker describes in simple, everyday language the big and little hazards and terrors of the soldier dealing with the known and the unknown for the first time.

The anguish of the war together with the inability to make someone else comprehend the feeling and the effect engendered in the soldier serves as the subject of the following

poem. The soldier looks back on a period in his life in which he was someone else; that "me" he feels, is no longer "me"; and he is desperately trying to explain this to his loved one. The poem is an anguished testimonial to the spiritual death that results from war.

i'm
asking
you dear to
what else could a
no but it doesn't
of course but you don't seem
to realize i can't make
it clearer war just isn't what
we imagine but please for god's 0
what the hell yes it's true that was
me but that me isn't me
can't you see now no not
any christ but you
must understand
why because
i am
dead

(1947)

The soldier himself, who may well have been the blond, innocent young man who went to war "for God for country and for Yale" has made the discovery that war isn't at all what he had been led to expect. Another facet of himself was active and responsible for whatever activities he had to engage in; it was not this present "me." And what else could that "me" do? he asks. The incoherence of the man's plea expresses his anguish at the recollection and at his inability to explain to his loved one why and how he has been destroyed by the war. Does the "i" who is dead refer to the original, innocent self which has been destroyed by the war, leaving

only a shell? The speaker attempts to answer all the cliché thinking of the person to whom he is talking. One wonders if possibly he is trying to answer what was once his own cliche thinking or to justify his rationalization of what he had to do. As soon as he starts to answer one question, he has to launch into a reply to another one; it is almost a process of association-thinking. In any event, even when war does not destroy the body, it destroys the spirit and the humanity of man; it lessens his stature as an individual, particularly in his own eyes. Cummings found that incarceration in a prisoner-of-war camp can restrict activities; but so long as there are warm-hearted human beings, one can transcend the bounds of space and time. In war, in the midst of action, one finds only the negation of life.

It is apparent that Cummings' criticism of war is based on his conviction of the immorality of war not only because it destroys human life, but also because it destroys the initiative and humanity of the individual. Basically Cummings is a religious poet. He is fond of quoting Christian platitudes which people mouth hypocritically while at the same time they go about doing the opposite. He would probably accept the tenets of Jesus as a way of life, but he cannot accept the religion <u>about</u> Jesus, for it fails to affirm life, and apparently it does not make a notable impact upon those who give it merely lip-service. Above and beyond the

teachings of Jesus, Cummings felt what amounts to a worship of life and love. He holds each person responsible as an individual to affirm life and his own individuality; he decries the abdication from this responsibility in order to gain status or security. He shows a wide range of reactions from a variety of people high and low on the economic, social, and intellectual level; it is only when one feels or acts as an individual that he could join the select group of the "Delectable Mountains."

Cummings uses a variety of forms, levels of diction, variance of situations, and points of view in delineating the weaknesses in our society. The use of slang, vulgarisms, and cliches are standard techniques in satire, and Cummings is one of the most bitter satirists of his day. His pen dripping acid, he attacks the business and advertising techniques which turn individuals into conformists; he does this by using advertising's own techniques to bombard the public. In his own way, and much earlier, he made much the same prophetic analysis that René Gillouin reported in a book published in 1957:

> In short, technique, if it is not alone responsible for the tragedy of our times, has contributed to it in various direct and indirect ways, because of what it has done, because of what it has favored, because of what it has allowed, because of what it has not prevented. First, it has sinned against the spirit in reducing, as we were saying, the rich complexity of human nature to its rational component, and reason itself to its scientific component.[17]

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[17] René Gillouin, Man's Hangman is Man, translated from the French by Dorothy D. Lachman(Mundelein, Illinois, 1957), pp. 70-71.

The substitution of science for religion and security for personal initiative has been evidenced in every major area of human activity. Following World War I, the Briand Kelloggpact was met by a deception which was "an illusion truly worthy of a time which no longer can distinguish between the real and the imaginary and, which, inept at taking thought for guide, uses it as an alibi."[18] Gillouin reacts with horror to the way language is used to manipulate people. When words, which in their original context are business terms, are now used to apply to war--for example, "profitable" engagements in which a maximum number of human lives are taken--we have "already passed from horror to indifference; we pass now from indifference to attraction...."[19]

Wartime has its own rationalization for the enforced molding of people to "military necessity," but molding techniques are also particularly in evidence in the fields of business and politics. The association of business with religion and politics was not a phenomenon of the 1920's only. Techniques and expression were relatively crude and apparent at that time, but scientific studies, particularly into motivational research, have made techniques surer, more psychologically sound, more artistic, and thus more

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[18] Ibid., p. 75.

[19] Ibid., p. 85.

aesthetically pleasing, on the surface at least. In addition, mass media are much more effective in bombarding the consumer and turning him into the object in a stimulus-response experiment. The way in which Americans have allowed themselves to be manipulated, the way in which they have accepted false and artificial values are subjects for many of Cummings' poems which expose a society that fails to affirm life and individuality. After World War I, Cummings turned his attention to this society which was existing in an uneasy peace.

CHAPTER THREE

THAT ANIMAL, 20th CENTURY MAN

"when man determined to destroy
himself he picked the was
of shall and finding only why
smashed it into because" [1]

Never one to follow a vogue, Cummings did not adhere to the idea that post-war France was the natural embodiment of everything good in life while America was "an opportunist ogre, a degenerate dollardragon."[2] Though this was the current fashion, Cummings writes of himself: "When he should have been patriotic, he wasn't. And now, when fashion dictates anti-patriotism, he finds himself thanking his lucky stars for the large and lively U.S.A."[3] This did not mean, however, that he would not see much to criticize in America; it may have meant that because he realized the promise of America, he would be that much more sensitive to its failure to live up to that promise. One of the reasons for Cummings' preference was that "France is not a <u>happening</u> nation"; it

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[1] "when god decided to invent," 1944.

[2] <u>Miscellany</u>, p. 95. Originally published in <u>Vanity Fair</u> (May 1927).

[3] <u>Ibid.</u>

took refuge in the past, and "to take refuge in the past--be your refugee a nation or an individual--means to commit a neurotic deed; the past, from this point of view, being a substitute for living."[4] While it might not always be moving in the best direction, America, on the other hand, was on the move; it was alive. Cummings, incidentally, judged most things on the basis of their "alive-ness": the animals at the zoo, burlesque, John Marin's paintings, Gaston Lachaise's sculpture, the circus; these were all part of the America that Cummings liked.

As a gadfly, however, Cummings pointed out what he considered to be the "undead" (that is, not truly alive, but not technically dead) aspects of American life. His play, Him, published in 1927 and produced by the Provincetown Players in 1928, sums up most of the factors of the American way of life to which Cummings objected. The use of slogans indicates the root of the trouble:

> Voice of Me: I hate history.
> Voice of Him: So do I.--Europe, Africa, Asia: continents of Give. America: the land of Keep--Keep in step Keep moving Keep moving Keep young Keep in touch with events Keep smiling Keep your shirt on Keep off the grass Keep your arms and limbs inside the car. National disease: constipation. National recreation: the movies. National heroes: Abraham Lincoln who suppressed his own smut, George Washington who bought slaves with rum and Congressman Mann who freed the slaves.

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[4] Ibid., p. 97.

> National Anthem: You Forgot to Remember. National advertisement: The Spirit of '76--a man with a flag a man with a fife and a drummerboy--caption: General Debility Youthful Errors and Loss of Manhood....[5]

As always, Cummings insisted upon the sacredness of the individual, and, discounting Freud and other scientists and pseudo-scientists, maintained the old transcendentalist belief that man has the power to choose, and to choose rightly. When man conforms to popular opinion, he does it either out of fear or desire for security. Speaking of his childhood in a world which he remembered as a challenge, Cummings compared it with the present striving for security:

> This inwardly immortal world of my adolescence recoils to its very roots whenever, nowadays, I see people who've been endowed with legs crawling on their chins after quote security unquote. 'Security?' I marvel to myself 'what is that? Something negative, undead, suspicious and suspecting; an avarice and an avoidance; a self-surrendering meanness of withdrawal; a numberable complacency and an innumerable cowardice. Who would be "secure"? Every and any slave. No free spirit ever dreamed of "security"--or, if he did, he laughed; and lived to shame his dream. No whole sinless sinful sleeping waking breathing human creature ever was (or could be) bought by, and sold for, "security." How monstrous and how feeble seems some unworld which would rather have its too than eat its cake![6]

Cummings has reiterated these ideas in a number of ways in his poems; the following is a brief, contemptuous, and vulgar expression of his attitude toward what he

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[5]E. E. Cummings, Him (New York, 1927), Act II, Scene VIII.

[6]Six Nonlectures, p. 43.

considers to be a great blight on the American mind:

economic secu
rity" is a cu
rious excu

se
(in

use among pu
purposive pu
nks)for pu

tting the arse
before the torse
(1938)

The derision he feels is effectively expressed by the use of alliteration, particularly within the parentheses; the explosive quality is heightened by the way the words are broken, together with the rhyme scheme; the effect is one of sneering contempt. The old saying, "putting the cart before the horse," is distorted to reflect mankind's further distortion of values and the consequent distortion of himself.

The choice made by mankind is contrasted with what he might have chosen, for his decisions have been deliberate:

when god decided to invent
everything he took one
breath bigger than a circustent
and everything began

when man determined to destroy
himself he picked the was
of shall and finding only why
smashed it into because
(1944)

The creation of the world is contrasted with the destruction of man by man. The poem stresses the inexorable

approach man uses to effect his own downfall. For Cummings, was is the "un-ness" or opposite of is or am. Is equals alive and being; was means death and "unliving." Shall implies the future which could be a daring and joyful one. By using was, the poet shows the destruction not only of the present but the future. In Cummings' language why is a word associated with alive and being. It implies life and curiosity, wonder and appreciation. Because belongs to the "unworld."[7] It is the dead-end answer to the question "Why?" Man has destroyed himself as an individual and a human by killing his sense of wonder and curiosity, and by settling for a sterile, authoritarian "answer." Just so does he settle for the sterility of security. Cummings' philosophy is well summed up in the first and last stanzas of a poem published in 1935:

> worshipping Same
> they squirm and they spawn
> and a world is for them, them; whose
> death's to be born)
> .....
> only who'll say
> "and this be my fame,
> the harder the wind blows the
> taller i am"

The ultimate in security and sameness is illustrated in the following poem, which begins as a satiric parody on the fairy-tale bedtime story of Peter Pan and ends in an

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[7]Norman Friedman's analysis of Cummings' language is most helpful; see E. E. Cummings, The Art of His Poetry (Baltimore, 1960), pp. 23-25.

inverted allusion to Kipling's "The Betrothed."

(of Ever-Ever Land i speak
sweet morons gather roun'
who does not dare to stand or sit
may take it lying down)

down with the human soul
and everything else uncanned
for everyone carries canopeners
in Ever-Ever land

(for Ever-Ever Land is a place
that's as simple as simple can be
and was built that way on purpose
for simple people like we)

down with hell and heaven
and all the religious fuss
infinity pleased our parents
one inch looks good to us

(and Ever-Ever Land is a place
that's measured and safe and known
where it's lucky to be unlucky
and the Hitler lies down with the cohn)

down above all with love
and everything perverse
or which makes some feel more better
when all ought to feel much worse

(but only sameness is normal
in Ever-Ever Land
for a bad cigar is a woman
but a gland is only a gland)

(1938)

The poem is organized to depict two worlds, both of which are either dead or non-existent. The stanzas in parentheses depict a world which is the fantasy of those people in the second world who have thrown out all real values. The attitudes and the organization of the poem approximate those of another of Kipling's poems, "The Gods of the Copy-book Headings." The allusion to Peter Pan's Never-Never Land

is interesting inasmuch as this land is inhabited by a large number of little boys who, having been dropped out of their perambulators by careless people, now are living with fairies and elves; never growing up, they always remain little boys. Ever-Ever Land is a considerable contrast with its lack of imagination and adventure; even the fantasy of "mostpeople" is very dull, and yet it is similar to the other inasmuch as it is only a fantasy.

Our world has in it much to criticize, and Cummings proceeds to point out all the values the twentieth century has thrown out, together with the results. After one has discarded the concept of the value of the individual, the human soul, together with religion and love, can be discarded, too. One can settle for the status quo; infinity can be airily disregarded when one can see no farther than an inch ahead. The "undead" condition of this world is evidenced in the word canned; one can always be sure of a uniform product in such a world. Everyone carries can openers because there is no need for anything else; there is no freshness, spontaneity, no venturing into the unknown, no creativity. All things have the same value: "the hitler lies down with the cohn." The result is a complete indifference to real values or real existent problems.

The choices made by such people are also distorted, even ludicrous. In the real world, love has been discarded

as being perverse; in Ever-Ever Land a woman is a bad cigar, and love is only a matter of glands. The parody on Kipling's poem is occasioned by the subject matter: the speaker in "The Betrothed," making the choice between a woman and a cigar, chooses the latter:

> There is peace in a Larranaga, there's calm in a Henry Clay;
> But the best cigar in an hour is finished and thrown away.
>
> Thrown away for another as perfect and ripe and brown--
> But I could not throw away Maggie for fear o' the talk of the town.
>
> .....
>
> A million surplus Maggies are willing to bear the yoke;
> And a woman is only a woman, but a good Cigar is a Smoke.[8]

The speaker's calculated choice is justified if one can equate love with sex or if expediency and material comforts are superior to a meaningful relationship with someone else. Since Cummings always preaches the gospel of love, it is evident that a land which considers love perverse is a monstrosity. Love, in its truest sense, must be between individuals; values are individually determined in Cummings' world of "born."

Concern with values in a world of "Same" is again the theme in the following poem:

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[8] Kipling, John Beechcroft, editor (New York, 1956), p. 415.

Jehovah buried, Satan dead
do fearers worship Much and Quick;
badness not being felt as bad,
itself thinks goodness what is meek;
obey says toc, submit says tic,
Eternity's a Five Year Plan:
if Joy with Pain shall hang in hock
who dares to call himself a man?

go dreamless knaves on Shadows fed,
your Harry's Tim, your Tom is Dick;
while Gadgets murder squawk and add,
the cult of same is all the chic;
by instruments, both span and spic,
are justly measured Spic and Span:
to kiss the mike if Jew turn kike
who dares to call himself a man?

loudly for Truth have liars pled,
their heels for Freedom slaves will click;
where Boobs are holy, poets mad,
illustrious punks of Progress shriek;
when Souls are outlawed, Hearts are sick,
Hearts being sick, Minds nothing can:
if Hate's a game and Love's a
who dares to call himself a man?

King Christ, this world is all aleak;
and lifepreservers there are none:
and waves which only He may walk
Who dares to call Himself a man.
(1935)

The distortion of values, the worship of sameness, materialism, and expediency all characterize this "unworld" which has buried God and killed off Satan. The new cult of conformity is characterized by rationalization, relativity, and gadgetry. The allusion to measuring that recurs in Cummings' poems is indicative of a statistics-conscious public which values data <u>about</u> people, not people themselves.

The transposition of words in the second line indicates the new attitude of "mostpeople"; the values held are a

complete reversal of traditional ones; Eternity is in the same category as that calculated economy, the Five Year Plan.

Dreams are gone; Joy and Pain are alien to this way of life: to be a man, one must both dare and feel. Reversal in values is particularly evident in the third stanza. The result of the outlawing of the soul is the destruction of man; henceforth, he substitutes homage to the instrument of the dissemination of mass values for homage to traditional religious values. With the god of the Old Testament gone, with the concept of evil destroyed, "this world is all aleak," and all within it are likely to be destroyed. It is in this poem that Jesus is referred to in the highest terms, as King Christ. Only his is the kind of belief and the courage it takes to be a man. For the most part, mankind is content to accept what is planned for him <u>en masse</u>. He deals so much with abstraction that he cannot recognize or appreciate a concrete situation; time and values are no longer meaningful for him.

These attitudes are again exemplified in a poem which despite its negations is largely one of affirmation:

> as freedom is a breakfast food
> or truth can live with right and wrong
> or molehills are from mountains made
> --long enough and just so long
> will being pay the rent of seem
> and genius please the talentgang
> and water most encourage flame

as hatracks into peachtrees grow
or hopes dance best on bald men's hair
and every finger is a toe
and any courage is a fear
--long enough and just so long
will the impure think all things pure
and hornets wail by children stung

or as the seeing are the blind
and robins never welcome spring
nor flatfolk prove their world is round
nor dingsters die at break of dong
and common's rare and millstones float
--long enough and just so long
tomorrow will not be too late

worms are the words but joy's the voice
down shall go which and up come who
breasts will be breasts thighs will be thighs
deeds cannot dream what dreams can do
--time is a tree(this life one leaf)
but love is the sky and i am for you
just so long and long enough

(1940)

This poem deals with the nature of truth and time, both of which are concerned with values. Freedom is referred to in a previously mentioned poem as a substance which is valued lightly; if it has any value at all, it must surely be more meaningful than a package of cereal. The poem delineates the misconceptions which must be resolved honestly and forthrightly by each individual. Each stanza is divided into two parts, the paradox and the resolution which in itself is a paradox. In technique, the poem is similar to "of Ever-Ever Land." The reiteration of the inexorable passing of time is handled like a countdown with the placement of the line "--long enough and just so long" in each of the four stanzas, culminating in the reversal of the words in the final line.

The conditions posed are irreconcilable opposites, and yet through rationalization and use of wordfact, "mostpeople" apparently assume that they can continue to exist without coming to terms with reality. But, warns the poet, this can go on "--long enough and just so long."

The final stanza summarily disposes of abstractions; "worms are the words"; they are meaningless. What matters is joy and love, for these are as limitless as the sky; these are actualities which will overcome abstractions: one lives and faces reality; in so doing, one resolves the paradoxes.

Less optimistic in tone than "as freedom is a breakfast food" but more simple in expression and more concrete in imagery is the following poem. The difference in tone is possibly due to the increasing organization, mechanization, and dehumanization of society which Cummings had been protesting for over thirty years. Implicit in each of the lines are the economic, political, and social attitudes and characteristics of society, 1950:

> when serpents bargain for the right to squirm
> and the sun strikes to gain a living wage--
> when thorns regard their roses with alarm
> and rainbows are insured against old age
>
> when every thrush may sing no new moon in
> if all screech-owls have not okayed his voice
> --and any wave signs on the dotted line
> or else an ocean is compelled to close
>
> when the oak begs permission of the birch
> to make an acorn--valleys accuse their
> mountains of having altitude--and march
> denounces april as a saboteur
>
> then we'll believe in that incredible
> unanimal mankind (and not until)

The paradoxes in the sonnet are ironic, even laughable, but the only reason they are so is that in nature things just are; they do what is natural and fitting, and they do not become involved in highly complex and unnatural machinations in order to carry out their functions. In striking contrast is mankind, who lives under the rules of collective bargaining, union contracts, labor czars, and conformist pressuring. When one remembers Cummings' assertion that labor should be a miracle, one can understand why he cannot believe in mankind as man or even as a member of the animal kingdom, for he has made of himself a thing outside of nature. Not until man again becomes a part of nature and begins to fulfil his natural function in a natural way will there be either hope for him or reason for belief in him.

Emphasizing mankind's alienation from nature, in a number of his poems Cummings uses monster images to depict man. Indeed, in "of all the blessings which to man"(1944), man is called a "collective pseudo-beast," for he is without the joy or the pain that an animal feels; since the creature is collective, he lacks even the individuality of the animal. Paradoxes are evident: progress has made it possible to live without a heart; furthermore, "...if sometimes he's prodded forth/to exercise her vote," it may be because he has been threatened with the loss of liberty. This is particularly paradoxical because he no longer has any liberty to lose.

But what is most paradoxical is the actuality of contemplating

> that strictly (and how) scienti-
> fic land of supernod
> where freedom is compulsory
> and only man is god

The land of Nod is the land of sleep; in the land of "supersleepingpills" freedom is compulsory; the last line again shows God interred and man, no longer vile, as he is in the hymn Cummings is paraphrasing, is now God.[9]

Descriptive of a lobotomy victim or of a robot is the new god:

> without a heart the animal
> is very very kind
> so kind it wouldn't like a soul
> and couldn't use a mind

Use of disease imagery in a poem of the same period shows the sickness of mind which has caused man to divorce himself from nature in the name of progress:

> pity this busy monster, manunkind,
>
> not. Progress is a comfortable disease:
> your victim (death and life safely beyond)
>
> plays with the bigness of his littleness
> --electrons deify one razorblade
> into a mountainrange; lenses extend
>
> unwish through curving wherewhen till unwish
> returns on its unself.
>
> A world of made
> is not a world of born--pity poor flesh
>
> and trees, poor stars and stones, but never
> this fine specimen of hypermagical

---

[9]The hymn is called "From Greenland's Icy Mountains"; these particular lines read: "Where every prospect pleases
And only man is vile."

ultraomnipotence. We doctors know

a hopeless case if--listen: there's a hell
of a good universe next door; let's go
(1944)

Again man is depicted as a monster, a thing he has become in the name of science or progress; he is suffering from a disease largely mental, a sort of sick Alice-in-Wonderland-itis. The diagnosis indicates a serious disease; the symptoms reveal the extent to which the monster's vision has been distorted. He has used science to further his own comfort; this has been the beginning and the end product. He is no longer even concerned with life and death; they do not really exist in his "world of made." In a way, he is much like the bizarre and atypical forms of life the scientist finds in a study of evolution. In scientific terminology, this phenomenon is called "racial old age" or "senescence"; one might explain the effects of man's disease to be in a positive allometric rate of growth in relation to his desire to be comfortable.

The prognosis is not favorable; the disease is fatal for man and for civilization. One can only look for a new universe which is free from this disease--a whimsical solution, at best. The misuse of scientific knowledge figures in many of Cummings' poems. In this particular poem, man is pictured as suffering from introspection which is projected outward onto a series of magnifying mirrors. As a result of his knowledge about, and application of electrons, he has

managed to deify himself and thus distort all values; in effect, his own products become his values. His narcissistic makeup contributes to his sin of hubris; he can even look on the magnificence of space and nature with pity.

One's first instinct is to "pity this busy monster, manunkind," but Cummings' second line reverses this. Manunkind connotes smallness and lack of kindness; since this creature is also a monster, he is not human, having lost all his human qualities as a result of his disease. No longer interested in infinity, he has become a victim of his own delusions which blind him to the natural world and that which is beyond himself. The poem illustrates perfectly Max Frisch's definition of technology as "the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it."[10]

Even more ominous is a poem which depicts the dismemberment of mankind. It is reminiscent of such contemporary writers as Beckett, Albee, and Ionesco in treating the predicament of modern man:

> this is a rubbish of human rind
> with a photograph
> clutched in the half
> of a hand and the word
> love underlined

---

[10]Max Fritsch, in Daniel J. Boorstein, The Image or What Happened to the American Dream (New York, 1962), quoted on the title page.

this is a girl who died in her mind
with a warm thick scream
and a keen cold groan
while the gadgets purred
and the gangsters dined

this is a deaf dumb church and blind
with an if in its soul
and a hole in its mind
where the young bell tolled
and the old vine twined

this is a dog of no known kind
with one white eye
and one black eye
and the eyes of his eyes
are as lost as you'll find

(1950)

The poem, recorded for the Freedom Broadcast in 1954[11] reiterates the death of the body, the mind, and the soul; in effect, all are thrown out on the rubbish heap. The poem is unified by the rhyme scheme and the repetition which creates the feeling of the inescapable march of those elements which destroy human-ness. There is irony and pathos in the first stanza; a particularly bitter reference to the husk or remains of the human body is followed by details which could refer to a soldier on the battlefield who is holding on to all which has meaning for him--a photograph and "the word/love underlined."

---

[11]Cummings was invited to make a tape-recording on the subject of Freedom with special emphasis on New England. It was to have been broadcast over NAEB at Urbana, Illinois, but it was never aired because of possible difficulty with the FCC--an interesting commentary on freedom. See Norman, pp. 356-358.

In the second stanza, the girl's mind gives out as a result of the horror she has experienced (a result of what happened in the first stanza?), but evil and mechanized force remain supreme and undisturbed.

To all this, the church is deaf, dumb, and blind. The word if is always used as a negative; in this case it represents a great void in the soul of the church as well as in its life. The "young bell" tolls for each young life that is destroyed, while the "old vines" of tradition help to maintain the old attitudes with which mankind has been cursed.[12]

The images appear to be opposing ones: love and hate; warmth and cold; young and old; white and black. The final effect is one which reveals stark indifference to human values. The last stanza is rather puzzling except in its final effect. The images depict a great abyss; the play on words in the last line emphasizes the feeling of the utter lostness and the lack of direction of mankind. In its effect, it is similar to E. B. White's story, "The Door."

The difference between Cummings' later work and his earlier poems is largely in tone and subtlety of expression. One notes similar ideas and images in both, but the degree of detachment of the poet in the later poems is particularly

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[12]The same idea is expressed in several of Sherwood Anderson's short stories and in his book Winesburg, Ohio (New York, 1919).

evident, as is the increasing degree of pessimism about mankind as a whole. Indicative of his youthful rebellion and explosive disgust as well as his attitude toward the general climate of the twenties is the following poem:

> Humanity i love you
> because you would rather black the boots of
> success than enquire whose soul dangles from his
> watch-chain which would be embarrassing for both
>
> parties and because you
> unflinchingly applaud all
> songs containing the words country home and
> mother when sung at the old howard
>
> Humanity i love you because
> when you're hard up you pawn your
> intelligence to buy a drink and when
> you're flush pride keeps
>
> you from the pawn shop and
> because you are continually committing
> nuisances but more
> especially in your own house
>
> Humanity i love you because you
> are perpetually putting the secret of
> life in your pants and forgetting
> it's there and sitting down
>
> on it
> and because you are
> forever making poems in the lap
> of death Humanity
>
> i hate you
>
> (1925)

Repeating the line, "Humanity i love you," Cummings, in brash tones, enumerates all the factors that make humanity particularly reprehensible to him: those people who sell their souls for success, those who applaud, without thinking, the old meaningless clichés. Humanity, says the poet, never

uses intelligence, fouls its own nest, and destroys the secret of life. The imagery is ugly for it depicts ugly and stupid actions. The reference to the songs sung at the Old Howard is significant, for Cummings, a connoisseur of burlesque, gives a most enlightening picture of Boston's Howard Athenaeum, circa 1912. Noting that it emanated a filth of almost indefinable quality, he also commented that its girls were only slightly less ugly in proportion to its amount of filth. But, says Cummings:

> Most significantly, the filth and ugliness of the Howard performed a very definite function. This function consisted in the framing of a mammoth collective picture of Mother with a capital M. Never have I seen and heard the maternal instinct glorified with such boundless, not to say delirious, enthusiasm, as in that unholy of unholies. The very bozo who had just distorted a harmless, popular ditty to include all known forms of human perversion would, without any warning whatever--that, of course, was the whole trick--plunge himself and us into a monologue whose reeking sentimentality made the Christmas Carol seem positively cynical. Immediately and to a man, those self-same muckers who had roared themselves hoarse over sin, shame, and sorrow would swell and bloat, and then snivel and finally even sob with unfeigned adoration of maternity. A better instance of the emotional versatility of the proletariat would be difficult to conceive.[13]

Cummings learned early about mob reaction or "most-people." In addition to the proletariat, he satirizes businessmen and business techniques, politics and politicians, and celebrities. In "exit a kind of unkindness exit," he

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[13]"Burlesque, I Love It," Miscellany, pp. 91-92. Originally published in Stage (March 1936).

addresses the businessman with something less than admiration:

little
mr Big
notbusy
Busi
ness notman

In short, derisive terms this poem, published in 1935, makes of the businessman something extremely small and unimportant; his busy-ness is reminiscent of Chaucer's Sergeant of the Law, who seemed busier than he was. There is also a satiric allusion to his being a captain of industry whose galleon bends like bad candy "& you/are dead/you captain." Cummings' respect had not risen noticeably by 1958, for he still refers to "business socalled men."[14]

Presumably, it is the businessman's methods which he finds objectionable; the process of mass production was one which appears to have filled him with something approximating horror. The use of the wheel as a symbol for progress recurs in his work; specifically he uses the idea of a wheelmine to show how people can be led into anything. The wheelmine forms a basic motif in the play, Santa Claus, but earlier he had written a satire in which figured Mr. X, an inscrutable man who "did not exist for the very far from inscrutable, the in fact merely obvious, reason that he was always much too busy not existing to exist even a little."[15]

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[14] #36 in 95 Poems (New York, 1958).

[15] "Mr. X," Miscellany, p. 207. Originally published in The Bookman (September, 1927).

The X's lived in a model Workers' Home and worked in the model Wheel Mines at Mekano which had been built by Drof (an obvious reversal in spelling), "the greatest industrial genius of the twentieth century," whose only hobby was collecting idées fixes. Cummings' hatred of dictatorship, censorship, or collectivism, no matter how benevolent, is evidenced as he goes on to explain that Drof's model collection of idées fixes was for the sole benefit of his employees, "all of whom familiarly called him 'Papa Drof' and, in return, were forbidden to drink, flirt, play cards for money or on Sunday, marry foolishly, read light fiction, sing, lie, expectorate, or swear."[16] The story ends with a recounting of Mr. X's day of tightly scheduled ritual, entertainment, and finally, his stint of silent work at silent machine #0987654321 which made silent wheels.

But it was not only the captains of industry on whom Cummings poured his contempt. In an age in which Arthur Miller has symbolized the American as a salesman, Cummings wrote the following:

> a salesman is an it that stinks Excuse
>
> Me whether it's president of the you were say
> or a jennelman name misder finger isn't
> important whether it's millions of other punks
> or just a handful absolutely doesn't
> matter and whether it's in lonjewray

---

[16] Ibid., p. 210.

or shrouds is immaterial it stinks

a salesman is an it that stinks to please

but whether to please itself or someone else
makes no more difference than if it sells
hate condoms education snakeoil vac
uum cleaners terror strawberries democ
ra(caveat emptor)cy superfluous hair

or Think We've Met subhuman rights Before
(1944)

This poem combines puns, two levels of diction--including the phonetic representation of the salesman's language--and the stereotyped approach of the seducer, to paint a revolting picture of the salesman as well as the products he sells. It depicts clearly and mercilessly what Cummings feels about the consumer age in a country which is as dead ("you were say") as the "shrouds."

First of all, the salesman is made a robot and referred to in neuter gender to effectively dehumanize him and to enable him to adapt to any and all products he sells and to all the customers he approaches. With equal vigor, the salesman can sell abstract ideas such as hate, education, and subhuman right or the concrete articles which are listed, many of which have unpleasant connotations. One notes again the lack of selectivity, concern, and individuality that enables the sloganmongers and cliche artists to sell to "mostpeople" anything they want to sell.

Despite the anonymous quality and the neuter gender, the salesman is characterized by associating his unpleasant

qualities with sexual images. Combined with the old approach of the masher, "Excuse Me...Think We've Met Before," are some of the articles mentioned, together with the sexual implications throughout the poem, but particularly in the third line. A warning against being taken in by the products or the approach, the phrase "caveat emptor," significantly enough, separates letters in the word democracy. It is a ruthlessly ugly picture that is painted; what emerges appears thoroughly sub-human.

An earlier poem depicts another typical American, a "death" named Smith, who is also far from the red-blooded male of past renown:

> he does not have to feel because he thinks
> (the thoughts of others, be it understood)
> he does not have to think because he knows
> (that anything is bad which you think good)
>
> because he knows, he cannot understand
> (why Jones don't pay me what he knows he owes)
> because he cannot understand, he drinks
> (and he drinks and he drinks and he drinks and)
>
> not bald. (Coughs) Two pale slippery small eyes
> balanced upon one broken babypout
> (pretty teeth wander into which and out
> of) Life, dost Thou contain a marvel than
> this death named Smith less strange?
> Married and lies
>
> afraid; aggressive and: American
> (1935)

Satire is accomplished by a combination of formal, lofty diction ("Life dost Thou contain a marvel than") with colloquial and even vulgate language. In part, the poem is

a variation on the theme of the security-minded "mostpeople" in America. The picture of Smith is not inspiring; he is hardly a man, for he is physically weak and unappealing, emotionally immature, even babyish, unable to think or to feel. His aggression is expressed toward people like Jones; otherwise he appears to be afraid of his wife and/or his own impulses. Like Miniver Cheevy he retreats into the false security of liquor, in his case as a result of his abdication from individuality. Since he is at the mercy of the thoughts of others, he must slavishly follow them and label as bad anything or anyone who expresses a different opinion. Another result of thinking the thoughts of others is that one is enabled to avoid feeling, a primary requisite for man living in Cummings' world.

Smith is a product of the collectivized and advertising-centered culture which he has allowed to destroy his individuality. In another poem, using the enemy's techniques, Cummings has combined clichés, advertisements, political slogans, and patriotic songs to form the verbal collage of "POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR. VINAL," published in 1926. The images created are also a conglomerate--mostly bathroom,[17]

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[17] In "Conflicting Aspects of Paris," pp. 58-61 in Miscellany, Cummings comments on the two different aspects of Paris, usually defined as the tourist's Paris, or "Paree," and the real Paris, or "Paname." Not entirely so, says Cummings. What really makes of Paris two distinct cities is the Holy War between the Worshippers of Life(or W.O.L.) and the

(This footnote is completed on the following page.)

largely coprological. There is, however, even about these natural functions an artificiality which is indicative of the society. Upon examining the popular periodicals of the twenties, one is struck by the advertising which is related to bodily functions and malfunctions. This excessive concern with largely automatic or mechanical functions appears to be symbolic of the mechanistic and "unalive"

> hun-dred-mil-lion-oth-ers, like
> all of you successfully if
> delicately gelded (or spaded)
> gentlemen (and ladies)

The constant repetition of cliches and slogans by advertising and political candidates has killed or deadened the original ideas:

> i would
> suggest that certain ideas gestures
> rhymes, like Gillette Razor Glades
> having been used and reused
> to the moment of dullness emphatically are
> Not To Be Resharpened.

These would include the clarion call to patriotism and the expression of hopeful optimism in this "land of Abraham Lincoln and Lydia E. Pinkham." By the same token, Helen and Cleopatra have been reduced to the same level as the current

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(This footnote is the completion of #17, previous page.) Worshippers of Bathtubs (or W.O.B.). "TO BE, OR TO BE BATHED--that is the question which threatens the world in general and Paris in particular." He further defines progress as "that form of prosperity which is intimately connected with bathing...." This essay was originally published in Vanity Fair (August 1926).

crop of "lovelies."

Cummings also scoffs at the equation of Art with the "arty" ideas from the woman's page in the newspaper, such as turning old shirttails into aprons--or in this case, drawers, which is more in keeping with the central images in the poem. What passes for art or beauty is artificial and dead. Art, says the speaker, cannot be a formula; art is more than photography. What it is held to be is equivalent to death; to intensify this idea, Cummings has substituted the word Life in Whitman's phrase "O World O Death."[18]

The poem is an attempt to show the state of existence of most Americans. They are nothing more than functioning, eliminating machines:

> tensetendoned and with
> upward vacant eyes, painfully
> perpetually crouched, quivering, upon the
> sternly allotted sandpile

---

[18]The nature of Art is one which concerns Cummings a good deal. He is particularly critical of the American who considers as Art only foreign art. As to Art itself, "It is Art because it is alive. It proves that, if you and I are to create it all, we must create with today and let all the Art schools and Medicis in the universe go hang themselves with yesterday's rope. ... Indeed, the Artist is no other than he who unlearns what he has learned, in order to know himself; and the agony of the Artist, far from being the result of the world's failure to discover and appreciate him, arises from his own personal struggle to discover, to appreciate and finally to express himself." From "The Agony of the Artist (With a Capital A)," Miscellany, p. 89. Originally published in Vanity Fair (April 1927). In commenting on Anthropos, Cummings' book with its subtitle, The Future of Art (New York, 1944) M.N.S. Whiteley notes that basic to Cummings' writing is the idea that "the individual IS and that the highest attainment of man is the Artist (in any medium)." "Savagely a Maker," Poetry LXX (July 1947 , pp. 216-217.

Products which are connected with bodily functions are equated with national heroes (Lincoln and Pinkham), Gillette Razor Blades, Odorono (a deodorant), Nujol (a laxative), Carter's Little Liver Pills, and toothpaste all help to make for a standardized neutered human product, an "unperson" who has lost his sex as well as his ability to sense or appreciate real things. The title itself indicates the artificiality of the age: Mr. Vinal sounds like something made out of plastic who would appear to be even more at home in 1962 than he was in 1926. Not real, Mr. Vinal looks no different from any other American, for all wear the same kind of shirt and collar and use the same nationally advertised products. The result is "undeath," a point made by the double entendre on the word spaded.

Excessive concern with bodily functions is one kind of neuroticism; another kind is that occasioned by concern with one's psyche, and Cummings gleefully and wittily attacks Freud and his disciples in a number of his poems. Both the rhyme scheme and the ideas are interesting in the following poem:

listen my children and you
shall hear the true

story of Mr Do
--nothing the wellknown parvenu
who

(having dreamed of a corkscrew
studied with Freud a year or two
and when Freud got through
with Do-

nothing Do
--nothing could do
nothing which you
and i are accustomed to
accomplish two

or three times, and even a few
more depending on the remu-
nerativeness of the stimulus (eheu
fu
-gaces Postu-
me boo

who)

(1926)

Many of the poems in Is 5 concern themselves with the effeminate and decadent characteristics of American males. The subject of the poem, "the wellknown parvenu," has nothing else to do with his time but neurotically concern himself with his own reactions. The poem begins with an allusion to that famous man of action, Paul Revere, who warned his countrymen of approaching danger. The twentieth century's Paul Revere is the speaker who warns of the paralysis which results from adhering to the so-called "scientific" theories of anyone--in this case, Freud. Specifically, Cummings implies that excessive concern with such theories is contrary to living as nature intended. When every sexual dream or symbol has to be analyzed, the result is bound to have an emasculating effect on all the Mr. Do's who may well end by being able to do nothing. The satire is enhanced by the arrangement of the words and by the use of the enemy's jargon: "depending on the remu/nerativeness of the stimulus." The conclusion

takes one back beyond Colonial America where the poem began to Rome and to Horace's poem about Hercules, another man of action, and the rueful awareness of what time does to man.[19] Freud is a relative late-comer on the scene, but in this instance, he has managed to speed up the process of slowing down.

The American at home is a strange mixture of obsessions and convictions and lack of conviction; further, he tends to take these abroad with him when he goes. During his sojourn abroad, Cummings was in a position to note the American tourist, and the results of his observations are preserved in several poems as well as in essays. One of the best known poems is "Memorabilia" (1926) which is written in a combination of levels of diction made up of slang, cliches, and biblical quotes. The resultant satire is a conglomerate description of average American tourists, "denizens of Omaha Altoona or what not enthusiastic cohorts from Duluth" whose numbers "are like unto the stars of Heaven." The speaker, parodying "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," announces sardonically:

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[19]Carl Harrington and Kenneth Scott, editors, Selections from Latin Prose and Poetry (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 203-204. Horace, II, xiv. This apparently is a reference to Horace's poem together with a pun. Originally it read, "Alas, the fleeting years slip by." In this case, part of the phrase has been left out and the form changed to read "Postume," vocative case. "boo/who" apparently is humorously phrased to express sadness and at the same time, to continue the age-old question of who Postumus is/was.

mine eyes have seen
the glory of

the coming of
the Americans particularly the
brand of marriageable nymph which is
armed with large legs rancid
voices Baedekers Mothers and kodaks

The eager tourists reveal an astonishing acquisition of facts, half-facts, guide books, foreign phrases (usually mispronounced), and dubious ability to judge art:

--the substantial dollarbringing virgins

"from the Loggia where
are we angels by O yes
beautiful we now pass through the look
girls in the style of that's the
foliage what is it didn't Ruskin

says about you got the haven't Marjorie
isn't this wellcurb simply darling"

--O Education :O

thos cook & son

(O to be a metope
now that triglyph's here)

Americans, who are dependent upon Thomas Cook & Son and Baedeker for their information about Europe, are introduced to what these gentlemen believe they should see, semi-absorb a hodge-podge of semi-related bits of information, interpose their own observations, and go home, having "seen" Europe. The last two lines parody Browning's "Home Thoughts from Abroad," and use Greek terms in the same way the tourists use

foreign phrases.[20]

This satire is relatively mild; it is with politics and politicians that Cummings deals in a devastating manner, with particular reference to the hypocrisy, pretentiousness, expediency, and greed he observed. Whether it was at home or abroad, Cummings deplored packaged "ideas," a point he makes succinctly and clearly in the following poem:

IN)
all those who got
athlete's mouth/jumping
on&off bandwaggons
(MEMORIAM
(1935)

The poem is a satiric commentary on those who choose the expedient way in adopting standards, philosophy, or political affiliations. An even briefer poem which is self-explanatory is one published in 1944:

a politician is an arse upon
which everyone has sat except a man

Cummings never has a good word to say for any bureaucracy whether it be labeled New Deal, Socialism, Communism, or Fascism. No matter how well motivated, emphasis on the importance of the state means a corresponding indifference to the individual as individual, and this, for

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[20]Lest one think Cummings has a reverence for the past as such, one need only read "(ponder, darling, these busted statues"(1926) to note that sculpture, architecture, and artifacts of all kinds are of momentary importance compared to life and the act of love.

Cummings, was the unforgivable sin. No matter how beleagured by pain and trouble one finds himself, he is at least alive; not for him "Joy with Pain shall hang in hock." Compared with him, a state is less than nothing:

> dead every enormous piece
> of nonsense which itself must call
> a state submicroscopic is--
> compared with pitying terrible
> some alive individual
>
> ten centuries of original soon
> or make it ten times ten are more
> than not entitled to complain
> --plunged in eternal now if who're
> by the five nevers of a lear
>
> (1944)

The poem begins with the word dead, and the reversed word order emphasizes the contrast between the dead state and the alive individual. Here again, an individual is born; a state is made. The test of living is to be plunged into the here and now of life and death.

If the state is the target of Cummings' barbs, so are the politicians who run it. Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt, and Eisenhower have all figured as targets for his scorn. But the cynical politician of the lowest echelon receives the roughest and most satiric treatment. This is evident in the 1940 poem, "the way to hump a cow." Norman Friedman has done a thorough job of analyzing it, noting that in his poetry Cummings has used occasional obscenity where it is appropriate. (Surely occasional is an understatement.)

the way to hump a cow is not
to get yourself a stool
but draw a line around the spot
and call it beautifool

This poem is spoken by an old-time political hack telling an aspirant the secrets of successful electioneering; and the fruits of wisdom are cynical--

to vote for me (all decent mem
and wonens will allows
which if they don't to hell with them)
is hows to hump a cows[21]

The attitude and the illiterate diction reveal the speaker as a crude, extremely cynical political opportunist who believes in underrating and taking advantage of everyone. Friedman also makes the point that the satire is ambiguously directed toward both the politician and the gullible electorate--not all of whom appear to be as gullible as the hack politician thinks they are.[22]

Describing or attributing low sexual characteristics to people or types he particularly dislikes appears to be a characteristic of Cummings. In another poem which depicts a gallery of representative types, he uses the ugliest images, most of them sexual, to portray them. The political candidate is the ugliest in the lot:

in response to howjedooze the candidate's new silk
lid bounds gently from his baldness
a smile masturbates softly in the vacant
lot of his physiognomy
his scientifically pressed trousers ejaculate spats

a strikingly succulent getup[23]

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[21]Friedman, p. 79.

[22]Ibid.

[23]"this evangelist," 1923.

At a time when the Fascists of all varieties, as well as the Communists, were preaching their doctrines to all who felt compelled to listen, in city auditoriums as well as in Madison Square Garden, Cummings attacked with this eight-lined invective:

red-flag and pink-flag
blackshirt and brown
strut-mince and stink-brag
have all come to town

some like it shot
and some like it hung
and some like it in the twot
nine months young

(1940)

This poem, which is a parody on the nursery rhymes "Hark Hark the Dogs Do Bark" and "Pease Porridge Hot," reveals a quite different atmosphere from the idealized world of childhood. The vulgarity in the unflattering characteristics of the fascists is intensified in the two compounds, "strut-mince" and "stink-brag." The only difference among the groups is the external difference in the color of the uniform or the flags they wave so passionately and mindlessly. Cummings may be implying that those characteristics he enunciates in the first stanza are naturally related to the coarse sexual characteristics in the second and thus compound the image of ugliness. His diction is vitriolic to say the least; it was not until somewhat later that he tempered his

satiric language.[24]

Political control on the national level as well as on the local level was anathema to Cummings, and he used every opportunity to protest it. Eimi (1933) was the manifesto of his stand. O'Connor notes that Cummings was the first American poet to attack the ideal of the political control as being either ideal or fitting inasmuch as it would make the individual subservient to the state.[25] In return, The Daily Worker viewed him with disaffection for both Eimi and his Collected Poems (1938). They particularly attacked the following one, which, interestingly enough, was not in the collection:

> kumrads die because they're told)
> kumrads die before they're old
> (kumrads aren't afraid to die
> kumrads don't
> and kumrads won't
> believe in life) and death knows whie
>
> (all good kumrads you can tell
> by their altrustic smell
> moscow pipes good kumrads dance)
> kumrads enjoy
> s. freud knows whoy
> the hope that you may mess your pance
>
> every kumrad is a bit
> of quite unmitigated hate
> (travelling in a futile groove
>
> (1935)

---

[24]Actual politicians are satirized in a number of Cummings' works. Mussolini, for example, is cast as a rather absurd Napoleon in Him, Act III, Scene iii.

[25]O'Connor, p. 248.

Part of the review read: "...Mr. Cummings probably wants his epitaph to read: 'here lies one whose name was writ in lower case.' At any rate, some bright Ph. D. might write a thesis on the Relation between Punctuation Marks and Reaction in the Poetry of E. E. Cummings."[26] The Worker, in reprinting the above poem, eliminated the first stanza and lines 3, 4, and 5 in the last stanza.[27]

In any event, the satire in "kumrads die..." is aided by the phonetic representation of the foreign accent, together with the simple sing-song rhythm which accentuates the puppet-like effect. For Cummings, the Communists represent a denial of life, love, and individuality. They were again the cause, in part, of a poem written much later which expressed the outrage he felt when neither America nor the West supported Hungary in her rebellion against Russia.

"Thanksgiving (1956)," which he read at the Boston Arts Festival in 1956, is a scornful satire directed at what he considered the apathy and cowardly doubletalk of the United States and the United Nations. Particularly interesting because of their historical significance are the allusions in "Thanksgiving." The poet alluded to is Rudyard Kipling; his poems are "The Truce of the Bear," and "The Gods of the

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[26]Norman, p. 317, quoting The Daily Worker, March 10, 1938.

[27]Ibid., p. 318.

Copybook Headings." The admonitions of Kipling are echoed in this poem written by another moralist, in 1956:

a monstering horror swallows
this unworld me by you
as the god of our fathers' fathers bows
to a which that walks like a who

but the voice-with-a-smile of democracy
announces night & day
"all poor little peoples that want to be free
just trust in the u s a"

suddenly uprose hungary
and she gave a terrible cry
"no slave's unlife shall murder me
for i will freely die"

she cried so high thermopylae
heard her and marathon
and all prehuman history
and finally The UN

"be quiet little hungary
and do as you are bid
a good kind bear is angary
we fear for the quo pro quid"

uncle sam shrugs his pretty
pink shoulders you know how
and he twitches a liberal titty
and lisps "i'm busy right now"

so rah-rah-rah democracy
let's all be thankful as hell
and bury the statue of liberty
(before it begins to smell)[28]

The rhythm of the poem is the first indication of the allusion to Kipling; the last line in the first stanza is a paraphrase of Kipling's poem (1898), "The Truce of the Bear," which warned the British not to trust Russia. The poem made

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[28] #39, 95 Poems.

him unpopular, but it was a prophetic poem which disclosed what happened to one man who took pity on the bear whose pleading stance made it look human. The man, blinded by the bear's subsequent savage attack, tells his tale:

> Over and over the story, ending as he began:--
> "There is no truce with Adam-zad, the Bear that looks like a Man!"[29]

Kipling's other poem, written in 1919, is called "The Gods of the Copybook Headings." It points out the difference between the old gods, the gods of the copybook headings whose truths are unpleasant ("Stick to the Devil you know"; "The wages of Sin is Death"; and "If you don't Work you Die") and the gods of the marketplace who appeal to men because they promise them beautiful things. These false gods lead men to their doom, and the old gods come back again, only to repeat the cycle.[30]

That the cycle is in process is attested to by Cummings. The highly unflattering image of Uncle Sam is similar to Cummings' usual picture of the effeminate male, weak, decadent, ineffectual, and cowardly.[31] He is capable only of

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[29]Kipling, p. 484.

[30]Ibid., p. 504. Compare "all ignorance toboggans into know."

[31]See "why are these pipples taking their hets off?" (1924) for his contrast between the creative artist and the decadent males in society who need monkey glands to rejuvenate them. See also "this young question mark man," 1926.

talk: "the voice-with-the-smile of democracy" doubtless refers to the "Voice of America" but it also alludes to one of the major businesses, the telephone company, whose operators are advertised in much the same way. It is undoubtedly a case of business as usual, in addition to fear of the consequences should Russia become angry at American interference, that makes Uncle Sam so chary of giving aid. In any case, liberty is dead and it should be buried to get it out of sight and smell.

It is obvious that twentieth century man has sold his soul for a mess of toothpaste and television and has called it progress. His smile is gleaming if sometimes a little anxious; his comforts have so engulfed him that he cannot tell the real from the unreal; his "entertainment" is slick, canned, devoid for the most part, of any human quality or honest depiction of life. He is beset by a welter of conflicting images which are reflected back at him from all the dead, shiny, and sterile surfaces around him.

Occasionally there is one who is aware that something is wrong, although he is evidently incapable of correcting it, or possibly, even evaluating it. He is the one whose plight is most poignant, for "the eyes of his eyes are as lost as you'll find"; they are the eyes of the conditioned rats and the conditioned man in E. B. White's story "The Door."

To Cummings, the evil underlying contemporary man's loss of values and his inability to look outside himself long enough to live is the result of his worship of progress. Having thrown out the old values and his Hebraic-Hellenic inheritance as an individual, man has enshrined within himself the new god Science, which has become the John the Baptist for Progress.

Nor was what passed for the old religion any more acceptable to him. The pretentious hypocrisy of self-professed religious people sickened him. In his early life he was a brash and angry young man who in his own way threw out many traditional values and criticized everything in sight. Despite what his critics have said, however, his later poetry shows a tempering of attitude, less negation, and more stress on finding and perfecting the individual within himself. He became, in fact, "man being himself"; heeding his own admonitions he excluded from his life the clamor of the new gods, Science and Progress.

These, then, are the most significant poems which treat the condition and the characteristics of the American people. With wit and humor Cummings points out the foibles of his fellows; with savage bitterness and invective he attacks those types and those attitudes which he considers particularly obnoxious and destructive of the individual and the full and rich life he should enjoy. In order to determine

why conditions are as they are, one must examine those of his poems which treat the causes. Cummings is primarily a religious poet, and it is necessary to understand his values and the concern he felt for the death of the old values as a result of the substitution of science for religion.

CHAPTER FOUR

TWENTIETH CENTURY NON-VERITIES

"nothing recedes like progress"[1]

Progress is a word which is distinctly ambiguous and abstract; thus it is closely akin to the word and the concept it superseded--God. There are, however, many other similarities between the two words or concepts. Like traditional religion, science has been used to justify many things which Cummings considers reprehensible. Probably the most flagrant and inhuman violation of human dignity was perpetrated during the Nazi regime with its purportedly "scientific" experiments in sadism. The application of scientific knowledge to militarism has already been discussed. Less overtly dehumanizing and therefore possibly more insidious for the ways it molds our thinking is the compilation of data about people and the predictions which are projected as a result of accumulated "facts." To achieve sameness in products, attitudes, and responses is the most efficient way to exist. The mass of data is used to promulgate the theory that all people are predictable and there are few individual differences among them.

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[1] "Jottings," Miscellany, p. 3.

One can use "scientific" data to engineer a "utopia" such as that depicted in Walden Two where people go to be conditioned to like being conditioned. The result is a happy, "well-rounded" individual who fits into his particular group secure in the knowledge that his needs will be taken care of and that he will no longer be forced to cope with overwhelming frustration or excessive emotion of any kind. His well-being is the result of wise planning; doubtless the author, B. F. Skinner, is an idealist who deplores the conditions of life and the worst aspects of human nature, as indeed Cummings does, but Cummings would never subject the individual to this, or any kind of "program."

The use of scientific knowledge or theories which sought to reduce the meaning of life or of man to test-tube measurability led Aldous Huxley, much earlier than Skinner's Walden Two, to write his frightening satire, Brave New World, in which scientific knowledge is used to plan, create, condition, and perpetuate the ultimate in the dehumanization of man. Huxley's Alphas and Epsilons become mere cogs in the economy; they exist only for the state. Human emotions are not quite decent; in fact, they are downright embarrassing and dangerous in an enlightened age which produces tranquilizers to soothe one's frustrations. This truly is a land where "only man is god," and where everything natural is shunned.

Cummings, too, deplores those aspects of man which

degrade him spiritually. The difference between Cummings' attitude and the attitudes of social reformers is the basic issue which crops up periodically, whether one could best reform conditions by attempting to effect changes in men or in society. The latter resolution was taken, a fact which rather effectively took care of man as an individual. In the interests of the society he must conform for the sake of the group; presumably "someone" knows what is best for the group. This, despite all protestations to the contrary, is the situation in Walden Two.

Cummings, however, has no such doctrine, and no program. He believes religiously in the right of each person to be himself and to realize his potential to the ultimate. Only when man is free to make his own decisions and to assume his own responsibilities will he be able to experience the joy and love which is inherent in his nature. Stiflers of these basic human impulses are satirically attacked and scourged by Cummings; many of them he found hiding behind masks of religion.

Nowhere was there a better example of such stifling than in the early days of the Massachusetts colony. Theocracy was limited to a small section of the country, but it lasted long enough to perpetrate much inhumanity to man, much hypocrisy and hysteria, many injustices, much smothering of the spirit. The religions which have followed early Puritanism have avoided coming to grips with reality; the

resulting hypocrisy is pointed out again and again by Cummings. The worst aspects of the old religion remain, while the new religion, science, has gained converts and power throughout the land. In comparing the old religion with the new, particularly as concerns the miraculous aspects, Cummings paraphrases the old scriptures:

> Religions, being for children, are based on miracle; as witness our own beloved religion, a successful cult of the truly miraculous. Science is that religion and that cult. To be sure, science is said to have dispensed with Santa Claus. But are not 'the miracles of science' (that Super Santa Claus) everywhere--from Brooklyn Bridge to Morning Mouth? Do not 'the miracles of science' move and think and feel for us? Do they not wash us this day our daily teeth and forgive (sic) our debtors?[2]

Nor was this attitude toward science a recent development, a point that Gerald Heard made:

> Newton banished God from nature, Darwin banished him from life, Freud drove him from the last fastness, the soul. It was all latent in Newton, in Descartes, in Galileo: mechanism would conquer all, once it had conquered nature, for man's body was sprung from nature and his mind from his body.[3]

The results have been to produce a world in which nothing is real and in which man lives in a state of "non-existence," ruled by clocks, calendars, conventions, and conformity--all in the name of progress. One of the reasons,

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[2]"Miracles and Dreams," Miscellany, p. 82. Originally published in Cinema, (June, 1930).

[3]Douglas Bush, Quoting Heard in Science and English Poetry (New York, 1950), p. 164.

of course, is the reliance on mind, not feeling. Cummings has been called an anti-intellectual for his attacks on the way in which mind has been allowed to overshadow heart. And true, mind is always opposed to heart and feeling; for Cummings, however, the latter are truer guides for living: "life is more true than reason can deceive," for "the mightiest mediations of mankind/cancelled are by one merely opening leaf."[4]

Cummings' pure lyrics affirm life; the best of his satire is lyrical also as it ruthlessly exposes what passes for life and beauty and in its negative aspects points up affirmation. In the following poem, he opposes Mind to Soul as he portrays the "canned" version of "beauty" which Hollywood produces. The poem begins with eulogistic language, but the image is shattered when the diction changes to the phonetic representation of the speech of the typical Hollywood director who is observed recording "bea/yew tea" in the world of "nonexistence." The sardonic inclusion of "And/Now" emphasizes both extremes of tone:

> The Mind's(
>
> i never you never
> he she or it
> never we you and they never
> saw so
> much heard so much smelled so much

---

[4]"life is more true than reason can deceive," 1944.

tasted
plus touched quite so And
How much nonexistence
eye sed bea

yew tea mis
eyesucks unyewkuntel finglestein idstings
yewrety oride lesgo eckshun

kemeruh daretoi
nig

)Ah, Soul

(1938)

The all-inclusive character of the future audience is accentuated by the grammatical exercise in cases of pronouns, the reiteration of the word much, and the enumeration of the five senses. The grammatically correct, stiff language in the first part of the poem is in sharp contrast to the slurred diction, slang, and puns in the last part. The sardonically rapturous "Ah, Soul" comes as a fitting climax to this particular mind's concept of what constitutes soul and beauty. Is it also a satiric way of saying that what is within the parentheses is the soul of this mind?

Emphasizing what can result from stress only on the mind, Cummings also scoffs at "yonder deadfromtheneckup graduate of a / somewhat obscure university," and pokes fun at "Miss Gay," a student at "radcliffe college, cambridge, mass..." to whom nobody seems to have mentioned ye olde freudian wish," but who "remarked something about 'stuffed/ fauna' being very interesting."[5]

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[5]"'Gay' is the captivating cognomen," 1931.

Mind is again opposed to soul in a later poem which is a series of conjectures on what "socalled" people would do with hearts, minds, and souls. The third stanza reflects a fractured image in a crazed mirror; it is the result of the misuse of the heart, the annihilation of the soul, and the death-like quality of those whose minds are really non-existent. Even if the minds came to life, says the poet, the "life" would be a stench in the nostrils.[6]

these people socalled were not given hearts
how should they be? their socalled hearts would think
these socalled people have no minds but if
they had their minds socalled would not exist

but if these not existing minds took life
such life could not begin to live id est
breathe but if such life could its breath would stink

and as for souls why souls are wholes not parts
but all these hundreds upon thousands of
people socalled if multiplied by twice
infinity could never equal one)

which may your million selves and my suffice
to through the only mystery of love
become while every sun goes round its moon

(1940)

The lack of wholeness in twentieth century man is a theme which obsesses the artist. Here Cummings points out the lack of soul which makes it possible for all the people in the world to be multiplied infinitely and yet never equal one who has learned to "become" through the mystery of love.

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[6]For a different treatment of the same theme, see "open his head baby," 1949.

This same theme is treated again in a sonnet which concludes:

> how should contented fools of fact envision
> the mystery of freedom? yet, among
> their loud exactitude of imprecision,
> you'll (silently alighting) and i'll sing
>
> while at us very deafly a most stares
> colossal hoax of clocks and calendars[7]
>
> (1947)

Using the language of the "unworld," Cummings compares objects in nature to people, and it is the stones, as it is in Jeffers' poetry, that are warmer and more "human." In the following poem, "whichful" refers to these people who are compared, unfavorably, to "this/friendly/himself of/ a boulder" who is more real and alive than the "noises/called people":

> elsewhere flat the mechanical
> itmaking
> sickness of mind sprawls
> here
>
> a livingly free mysterious
>
> dreamsoul floatstands
> oak by birch by maple
> pine
> by hemlock spruce by
>
> tamarack
>
> nothing pampered puny
> impatient
> and nothing
> ignoble
>
>)everywhere wonder[8]
>
> (1946)

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[7] "if (touched by love's own secret)we," 1947.

[8] "nothing whichful about," 1946.

The immobility and sickness which are the results of mechanization are in sharp contrast to the free floating quality achieved by living nature. Word choice and rhythm accentuate the poet's attitude; alliteration and assonance are skilfully used to contrast the constraint which is inevitable with mechanization ("nothing pampered puny/ impatient") with long flowing vowel sounds ("dreamsoul floatstands").

The mind and even the earth is transcended in Cummings' charming version of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," a poem which is given a seventeenth century flavor through its mention of the four elements which also accentuate the theme of time. Simultaneously, the poet mocks at the laws the mind devises to describe and control these elements:

mighty guest of merely me

--traveller from eternity;
in a single wish, receive
all i am and dream and have.

Be thou gay by dark and day:
gay as only truth is gay
(nothing's false, in earth in air
in water and in fire, but fear--

mind's a coward; lies are laws)
laugh, and make each no thy yes:
love, and give because the why

--gracious wanderer, be thou gay

(1950)

Like the twinkling star, the poem dances along in a happy rhythm and with an affirmation which is typical of much

of Cummings' later work; it is an affirmation which is child-like in its imaginative approach--as witness the first line. In opposition is the only falsity, fear; and fear is caused by the cowardly mind. This belief of Cummings is strikingly apparent even in his attitude toward dying. Throughout his poetry, one notes his unconcern about death and dying(and he makes a strong distinction between them); dying is nothing to be feared. The major cause of fear of dying is thinking about it. Death is all the things that Cummings criticizes; indeed, "mostpeople" have some of the same characteristics as death. Dying, however, is something which involves living, because it means change and because it is a natural cessation of the activity of life: "dying/'s miraculous." Death is the opposite:

> Death
>
> is strictly
> scientific
> & artificial &
>
> evil & legal)
>
> we thank thee
> god
> almighty for dying
>
> (forgive us, o life! the sin of Death[9]

Death can be ascertained by scientific criteria; and science is belaboured long and hard by Cummings. A scientist

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[9]"dying is fine) but Death," 1950.

is "a knowledge salesman";[10] he compiles data, analyzes, categorizes, prognosticates; in short, he is the god in his little world. Cummings has been called anti-intellectual, but he is not so in the usual sense, for he makes a distinction between knowledge and wisdom. In "A Foreward to Krazy," a celebration of an innocent democratic cat named Krazy who loves a cynical, brick-throwing, cat-hating mouse named Ignatz, and who is loved by a sentimental policeman-dog named Offisa Pup, he makes a profession of faith which underlies his whole philosophy:

> Life, to a lot of people, means either the triumph of mind over matter or the triumph of matter over mind; but you and I aren't a lot of people. We understand that, just as there is something--wisdom--infinitely more significant than mental prowess. ... If we know anything, we know that a lot of people can learn knowledge (which is the same thing as unlearning ignorance) but that none can learn wisdom. Wisdom, like love, is a spiritual gift.[11]

The pseudo-intellectual and the gullible public he satirizes unmercifully, compounding the satire by using the dialect of the uneducated:

> ..... a critic of note
> a serious thinker, a lyrical pote,
> lectured on Art from west to east
> --did sass-seyeity fall for it? Cheast!
> if a dowager balked at our hero's verse
> he'd knock her cold with a page from Jerse;
> why, he used to say to his friends, he used

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[10] Six Nonlectures, p. 104.

[11] Miscellany, p. 104. Originally published in Krazy Kat (New York: Henry Holt, 1946).

"for getting a debutante give me Prused"
and many's the heiress who's up and swooned
after one canto by Ezra Pooned
(or--to borrow a cadence from Karl the Marx--
a biting chipmunk never barx).

The poem is also an indictment of the intellectuals of the thirties who turned to a system, Communism, as an answer to the problems of the time. The mind can thus be used to betray or fool oneself and to provide a rationalization for one's irresponsibility:

For what did our intellectual do,
when he found himself so empty and blo?
he pondered a while and he said, said he
"It's the social system, it isn't me!
Not I am a fake, but America's phoney!
Not I am no artist, but Art's boloney!
Or--briefly to paraphrase Karl the Marx--
'The first law of nature is, trees will be parx.'"[12]

It is apparent that knowledge does not equal wisdom, for an individual who merges with a group is no longer an individual. The danger in knowledge lies in the inevitability of accepting facts as final answers, thereby killing the dream and the search for truth:

all knowing's having and have is (you guess)
perhaps the very unkindest way to kill
each of those creatures called one's self...[13]

Cummings points out what has happened as a result of man's desire to harness nature. Instead of observing and enjoying

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[12]"Ballad of an Intellectual," Miscellany, p. 229. From Americana, (December 1932).

[13]"a peopleshaped toomany-ness far too," 1940.

nature, he has acquired data about it:

> science must
> bait laws with
> stars to catch telescopes[14]

The similarity to Whitman's poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" is apparent in its emphasis on people who watch the stars through telescopes in order to formulate or prove laws. Knowledge of laws brings progress, and for Cummings, progress was "the foetal grave." The treatment of space and time in the following sonnet is interesting, for it approaches these subjects both unscientifically and meaningfully and ends with an affirmation which is typically Cummings:

> you shall above all things be glad and young.
> For if you're young, whatever life you wear
>
> it will become you; and if you are glad
> whatever's living will yourself become.
> Girlboys may nothing more than boygirls need:
> i can entirely her only love
>
> whose any mystery makes every man's
> flesh put space on; and his mind take off time
>
> that you should ever think, may god forbid
> and(in his mercy) your true lover spare:
> for that way knowledge lies, the foetal grave
> called progress, and negation's dead undoom.
>
> I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing
> than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance
>
> (1938)

"Negation's dead undoom" is the result of progress; it is the antithesis of the mystery of love "whose any

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[14]"beware beware beware," 1938.

mystery makes every man's/flesh put space on; and his mind take off time." The final couplet is the triumphant assertion of the importance of feeling over thinking.

In somewhat the same vein, and using the language of mathematics, Cummings reiterates his principal criticism of science:

> one's not half two. It's two are halves of one:
> which halves reintegrating, shall occur
> no death and any quantity; but than
> all numberable mosts the actual more
>
> minds ignorant of stern miraculous
> this every truth--beware of heartless them
> (given the scalpel, they dissect a kiss;
> or, sold the reason, they undream a dream)
>
> one is the song which fiends and angels sing:
> all murdering lies by mortals told make two.
> Let liars wilt, repaying life they're loaned;
> we(by a gift called dying born) must grow
>
> deep in dark least ourselves remembering
> love only rides his year.
>
> All lose, whole find.
> (1943)

Again, there is the assumption that everything can be analyzed and categorized into scientific components--even love and kisses. And again, the scientist, the knowledge salesman, "undreams the dream." Not for Cummings is the shattered image or the unintegrated parts; his is the one, the whole. The final line is a variation of the biblical quote, "He who loses his life shall find it"; does it mean that all "lose" their lives, but he who lives a whole life shall find it?

One of Cummings' techniques, a favorite of the satirist, is to use the opposition's terms to confound him. An unflattering image of the scientific intellect is pictured in the following poem:

but granted that it's nothing paradoxically enough beyond
mere personal

pride which tends to compel me to admit i've died)
seeing your bald intellect collywobbling on its feeble stem is

believing science (2b)^{n} herr professor m

(1931)

Related to science which designs machinery and devises methods to control populations is a poem which concerns itself with the idea that "what's beyond logic happens beneath will"; and while "machinery is more accurate, yes" what is most important is to <u>be</u>, to <u>live</u>:

> i mean that the blond absence of any program
> except last and always and first to live
> makes unimportant what i and you believe;
> not for philosophy does this rose give a damn...

Cummings defies science and the believers in science:

> (While you and i have lips and voices which
> are for kissing and to sing with
> who cares if some oneeyed son of a bitch
> invents an instrument to measure Spring with?

And dreams, he says, are born; they are not made.[15]

Destroyers of the dream are many and varied. Cummings commends "O hairless-chested females," and "every nonelastic

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[15]"voices to voices, lip to lip," 1924.

male" who have not been gullible enough to swallow the pronouncements of those pseudo-scientists, the psychologists, who consider "Santa Claus a criminal." He applauds "all joybegotten whelps whom soothe/psychotic myths like Jonah And The Whale." Tampering with the world of fantasy, whether it was in nursery rhymes, fairy tales, or myths like Santa Claus was desecration to Cummings, who attacked all psychological and scientific theories that would destroy the child's last refuge, his imagination.

Those who accept the pronouncements of science as gospel truth, even though they may not understand them or may pervert them are sitting game for Cummings. Bitterly satiric is the following poem:

proud of his scientific attitude

and liked the prince of wales wife wants to die
but the doctors won't let her comma considers frood
whom he pronounces young mistaken and
cradles in rubbery one somewhat hand
the paper destinies of nations sic
item a bounceless period unshy
the empty house is full O Yes of guk
rooms daughter item son a woopsing queer
colon hobby photography never has plumbed
the h&ights of prowst but respects artists if
they are sincere proud of his scientif
ic attitude and liked the king of) hear

ye! the godless are the dull and the dull are the damned.
(1940)

The poem combines levels of diction ranging from slang to archaic to reveal the mind of the person under discussion. It is a thoroughly confused mind; it has thrown off traditional

attitudes about God but has substituted a corresponding credulity toward science. Indicative of his mentality is the way he confuses Freud with Jung; he believes, however, that he has a scientific attitude. Lacking the criteria to understand or judge art, he mouths the usual attitudes toward art and artists. Meanwhile, his need for an authoritarian figure (since he is incapable of being master of his own destiny despite his "rubbery" control over nations) causes him to admire monarchy, a system which would offer him the security he needs. The juxtaposition of "scientific attitude" with monarchy is found at the beginning and the end of the poem. As is often the case in Cummings, the word choice and arrangement make for at least two levels of meaning. The choice of words which make up the sexual allusions reveal a deviancy of which the subject of the poem appears ignorant; it is apparent that he is unaware of what is happening in his own home, for "the godless are the dull and the dull are the damned."

Cummings can damn with invective, but he can also humorously point out some of the more absurd uses to which science has been put:

```
o pr

  gress verily thou art m
  mentous superc
  lossol hyperpr
  digious etc i kn
  w & if you d

  n't why g
  to yonder s
  called newsreel s
  called theatre & with your
  wn eyes beh

  ld  The
          (The president The
          president of The president
          of the The)president of

          the (united The president of the
          united states The president of the united
          states of The President Of The) United States

          Of America unde negant redire quemquam supp
  sedly thr

  w
   i
    n
     g
      a
       b
        aseball
```

(1935)

The technique in this poem is interesting, for it illustrates Cummings' sense of humor, his versatility and imagination, and his sense of the appropriate. The o is used in different ways. Its placement at the beginning is a kind of foreshadowing, for it is the pictorial representation of the baseball which is the subject of the poem. In addition to providing the intellectual appeal of the anagram, the multiple use of the o illustrates the way to save time

and effort, surely a laudable achievement in a world where speed and progress are worshipped. The incremental technique in the phrase "The president of the united states" serves to portray visually a man winding up before throwing a baseball. The fact that it is the President of the United States is no deterrent to Cummings' satire, for he scorns those in high place no matter who they are. The use of Hollywood's superlatives to describe this "momentous" occasion is heightened by etc and &. Progress is assailed because scientific techniques are used in a manner which hardly lends much dignity to the office of the President, particularly since the latter does not appear to have much skill in throwing the ball. The inclusion of the Latin phrase is interesting; "at last they refuse to go back." In a world in which Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were destroying freedom and humanity, Americans were going to "socalled" newsreel theatres to watch the President throw out the first baseball.

Possibly people went to such theatres to overcome the wearily deadening effect that popularized scientific theories had on the imagination and on the feeling response of the individual to the miracles of the universe. Another poem which is again reminiscent of Walt Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" is "kind YM&WC," published in 1938. Everything is categorized in sterile, "YW&YM...A" terms in the down-to-earth, no-nonsense, new "bedtime/less un... story"

of the scientific era. The old poem in which the moon is called the North Wind's cookie has been changed; now the universe is compared to a cookie. Virtually everything in the poem has been manufactured by man: the "harmlessly accurate/gloom," and the "mechanical dawn." Instead of our being enveloped in the "dear beautiful eternal night," the scientists are engaged in "atrickling a/-rithmetic o-/ver me you & all those & that." The carefully middle-of-the-road attitude taken in lieu of an emotional reaction is also indicated in the sardonic reference to the "Y's," particularly the words in the parentheses: "kind)...(of sort of)." The dry, purely theoretical, and intellectual approach which science has made mandatory has created an artificiality reminiscent of Forster's story, "The Machine Stops."

...")shapley

has compared the universe
to a
uh" pause
"Cookie

but" nonvisibly smi-
ling through man
-ufactured harmlessly accurate
gloom "I
think he might now be inclined to describe
it rather as
a" pause "uh"
cough

"Biscuit"

Cummings' satire is directed at this scientific quibbling, for the distinction between a cookie and a biscuit

is surely not a universe-shaking matter. One remembers Wordsworth's observation "we murder to dissect"; one also recalls Eliot's "Prufrock." The lecturer is as dry and uninspired as the biscuit; he is as un-alive as the "harmlessly accurate/gloom," and the "mechanical dawn." The reaction of the poet is like that of Whitman:

> 1 St
> ep
>
> into the not
> merely immeasurable into
> the mightily alive the
> dear beautiful eternal night

Science explains the universe in homey, concrete terms and thereby tries to reduce it to the level of man's understanding. When science attempts to describe the universe in scientific terminology using abstract concepts, the results can be pathetic, hilarious, and ironic, particularly when the poem can be read on several levels of meaning:

> Space being (don't forget to remember) Curved
> (and that reminds me who said o yes Frost
> Something there is which isn't fond of walls)
>
> an electromagnetic (now I've lost
> the) Einstein expanded Newton's law preserved
> conTinuum (but we read that beFore)
>
> of Course life being just a Reflex you
> know since Everything is Relative or
>
> to sum it All Up god being Dead(not to
>
> mention inTerred)
> LONG LIVE thatUpwardlooking
> Serene Illustrious and Deatific
> Lord of Creation, MAN:
> at a least crooking
> of Whose compassionate digit, earth's most terrific
> quadruped swoons into billiardBalls!
>
> (1931)

The unusually high number of capitals in this poem immediately leads one to suspect that Cummings is training his critical gun on some object which is flying high. The clay pigeons of this Buffalo Bill are the new gods, science and psychology. Capitalization produces several results: it provides the stress which depicts the speaker's chirping tones as he parrots the new theology (somewhat in the same way Salinger's use of italics mercilessly reveals his characters); it also shows the fragmentary quality of the knowledge and at the same time leads up to a contemptuous explosion of scorn at the end. The triumphant tone of the speaker of the line, "to sum it All Up," triggers the derision of a poet who has the "shocked, bug-eyed wonder of the first man on his first day." He satirically praises and damns the gullible complacency of that "rational...Lord of Creation, MAN," and disposes of him neatly by emphasizing his place in the animal kingdom at the mercy of his animal drives and emotions, no longer the "Beatific/Lord of Creation."

The early allusion to Frost is of interest. If Einstein's theory is correct, space is probably finite, as is time. If it is finite, space, theoretically, must curve in on itself, thereby forming a mathematical "wall." The attempt to define and categorize space is as absurd and meaningless as was the notion of Frost's "old stone savage" to wall out--or in--something which wasn't really there in

the first place: "Oh, just another kind of out-door game." The deliberate misquote (compare "Something there is that doesn't love a wall") appears to be a natural error, but the substitution is an example of irony. Although Cummings did not care particularly for Frost's poetry--it lacked intensity, he said[16]--he would certainly note their parallels in thinking on this subject. The neighbor in Frost's poem is much like the glib expounder of theories in Cummings' poem:

> He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
> Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
> He will not go beyond his father's saying,
> And he likes having thought of it so well
> He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."[17]

The jumble of scientific theories expressed in cliches characterizes the speaker. "Everything is Relative" is only a cliche; this is not precisely what relativity means, for everything must be relative to something else. The last line may refer to the usual scientific demonstration which represents atoms and the random motion of atoms; substituting billiard balls for the usual round bead-like objects and making of the phrase an exclamation accentuate the sexual allusions throughout the poem. Cummings' use of puns is evident; he has deliberately used the word interred, and he has written it to suit his intentions; he is obviously in the tradition not only of Swift, but also of Sterne and Joyce.

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[17]Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 47.

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[16]Norman, p. 186.

[17]Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York, 1949), p. 47.

The poem illustrates the muddled thinking of the layman which is due to failure to grasp the fact that "the theory of Einstein is purely physical, and is not concerned with time as we live it, or with the inner values of experience."[18]

The inner values of experience certainly include religion, and since Cummings is essentially concerned with religious attitudes, it is inevitable that religious imagery and references crop up in many of his poems--possibly an inevitable result of his childhood as the son of a minister. His attitude toward war is based in part on the paradox and hypocrisy inherent in a people which justify killing "as an act of Christian love." The hubris of mankind is stressed again and again as Cummings notes the results of following Pope's adage, "The proper study of mankind is man." According to Cummings, the acceptance of science as dogma is responsible for most of the problems and misconceptions of modern man. From Santa Claus comes the following expression of the poet's feelings:

> Woman: Knowledge has taken love out of the world
> And all the world is empty empty empty:
> for a man who cannot love is not a man,
> and only a woman in love can be a woman;
> and from their love alone, joy is born--joy![19]

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[18] Restrevor Hamilton, The Tell-Tale Article, (New York, 1950), p. 72.

[19] Scene 5.

Cummings attacks the substitution of science for religion, but his criticism also extends to religion as it is practised, or not practised, and the resulting lack of humanity, the hypocrisy, and the failure to observe a code of ethics. But it is not on the basis of the shortcomings of Jews and Negroes in these areas that Eleanor Sickels has accused Cummings of showing a dislike for Jews and condescension toward Negroes.[20] On the one hand, Miss Sickels states that Cummings is drawn to groups such as Negroes "to whom he ascribes unintellectual delight in life,"[21] a statement which is somewhat contradictory to her first one. In addition, she maintains that Cummings clearly dislikes Jews "whom he identifies with intellectualism and commercialism in many puns, acrostics and epigrams," and that "the denial of love to most of humanity underlines...the undemocratic nature of Mr. Cummings' individualism."[22] In an otherwise laudatory article, Barbara Watson ascribes to Cummings a hatred of Catholics.[23]

One can only turn to Cummings' written work and what

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[20]Eleanor Sickels, "The Unworld of E. E. Cummings," American Literature XXVI (May 1954), p. 231.

[21]Ibid., p. 224.

[22]Ibid., p. 231.

[23]Barbara Watson, "The Dangers of Security: E. E. Cummings' Revolt Against the Future," Kenyon Review XVIII (Autumn 1956), p. 532).

little there is of a biographical nature to try to determine the truth or lack of truth in these statements. On first consideration, one would expect a social critic to have a good deal to say about the second class citizenship of the Negro in America. But there appears to be no real reference to the Negroes as a group. The Negro as Negro is treated in an article phrased in legal terminology, and ending with extremely bitter Swiftian invective. Addressing himself to the defendant, the Negro, he pronounces the following judgement:

> I hereby affirm that to the best of my knowledge and belief you have been conclusively proved,
> in flagranti delicto, with full benefit of testimony,
> to have committed a foul degenerate heinous and inhuman offence against your innocent and unsuspecting fellow-citizens, not to mention their lives their fortunes and their sacred andsoforth,
> namely and to wit,
> that hereby you were black in color at the time of your hereby birth.
> In consideration of which, I,
> by hereby virtue of andsoforth,
> do hereby extend to hereby you, on behalf of the government of the Benighted States of Hysterica, that glorious andsoforth alternative which is the illustrious andsoforth prerogative of every andsoforth citizen; and which is in accordance with the dictates of justice and of mercy, as revealed to our forefathers in the Declaration of Interdependence; and which, in the ultraenlightened opinion of the supercivilized majority of the hyperhuman andsoforth race, constitutes a glowing andsoforth nucleus andsoforth of radiant andsoforth andsoforth.[24]

At the conclusion, he assigns to the guilty party the punishment of all "rightthinking people," and then lists all the

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[24]"Speech II," Miscellany, p. 235. Originally published in Partisan Review (March 1938).

horrors that have been perpetrated upon the Negro as his final punishment for having been born with a black skin.

One of the most gentle, sympathetic characters in The Enormous Room is Jean Le Negre. It is evident that Jean's capacity for enjoyment of life and being is responsible for the warmth and affection Cummings felt for him. The same capacity for enjoyment is noticeable in poems in which there have been Negroes. The word nigger is used; this is one of the reasons given for the assertion that Cummings is anti-Negro. One wonders if this is not the same sort of reaction which caused Huckleberry Finn, a book whose hero was notably sympathetic toward a Negro character, to be banned from the New York City schools. In the dialect and diction of the Negro is the following poem which is a celebration of the Negro's enjoyment of life and music:

theys sO alive
(who is
?niggers)

Not jes
livin
not Jes alive But
So alive (they

s
born alive)
some folks aint born
somes born dead an
somes born alive(but

niggers
is
all
born
so
Alive)

ump-A-tum
;tee-die

uM-tuM
tidl
-id
umptyumpty(OO---

!

ting
Bam-
:do)
chippity.

(1935)

The movement of the poem on the page is the jazz rhythm of the Negro snapping his fingers in time with his tune as he moves down the street. Here the Negro himself is talking or acting his aliveness and comparing himself with "somes" who are "unalive." Another poem which celebrates the refusal of the Negro to be overcome by the world is one which is again written in Negro dialect with a lilting rhythm and

a play on words which add humor and meaning to the poem. It combines the natural sense of rhythm of the Negro together with his spontaneous response to life;

hooz
gwine ter
hate
dad hurt
fool wurl no gal no
boy
(day simbully loves id)fer

ids dare
pain dares un
no
budy elses un ids
dare dare
joy
(eye kinely thank you)[25]

(1940)

The poem shows a striking acceptance of joy and pain and an ability to face reality with affirmation. The Negro himself is not aware of the pun on id; this is the scientific American's explanation for the life forces which the Negro accepts as natural.

Another poem which has a nursery rhyme or fairy tale approach and a poignantly haunting quality again employs the word nigger:

one day a nigger
caught in his hand
a little star no bigger
than not to understand

"i'll never let you go
until you've made me white"
so she did and now
stars shine at night

(1945)

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[25]"one slipslouch twi," 1940.

In this case the word nigger is a link with the last line of the first stanza. The simplicity of the diction does not make for a simple understanding or explanation of the poem. One gets caught up in its dream-like quality, a wishing-on-a-star mood. What is tragic is the realization that anyone would wish to be other than what he is, and for this kind of reason especially.

A Negro ragtime pianist is the subject of "ta/ppin/g/ toe"(1922), a short, sketch in syncopated rhythm. Another poem casually mentions the effect of a voice: "softly in the hot alley/a nigger's voice feels curiously cool."[26] In another, in which the nativity scene is described, the angels are depicted as having faces like Jim Europe.[27] One wonders what associations made Cummings choose Europe, a well known colored bandleader of the twenties.

There appears to be nothing derogatory in these poems; they are, instead, a celebration of individuals and further exemplify Cummings' basic philosophy of the importance of being oneself. It may well be his inability to identify with groups or to look at people en masse which has kept him from writing about one particular group of people as a whole. A white-hot anger, scathing in its denunciation, is evident in

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[26]"a blue woman with sticking out breasts," 1925.

[27]"(and i imagine," 1925.

the one address that he has made on the position of the Negro in our society. To state that an opprobius term makes one anti-anything is to discount the rest of the poem, to ignore the speaker and his philosophy of life and the possible reasons he may have had for using the term in the first place. Barbara Watson suggests that the word nigger is an unspoken assertion of the rights of love;[28] if Cummings uses the term and yet shows respect and admiration as it is apparent he does, her point may be valid. It would be in keeping with the philosophy of his version of the Good Smaritan, "a man who had fallen among thieves."

Cummings' use of the word kike has earned for him the term "anti-Semite." Some of his more obnoxious characters speak with what appears to be a Yiddish accent, as for example, the movie director in "The Mind's(" as well as various salesmen of one thing or another. One of the earliest poems which was labeled anti-Semitic was the following:

IKEY(GOLDBERG)'S WORTH I'M
TOLD $ SEVERAL MILLION
FINKELESTEIN (FRITZ) LIVES
AT THE RITZ WEAR
earl & wilson COLLARS

(1926)

The capitals and the dollar sign provide the neon lights and the aura of conspicuous consumption about the poem. The poem which seems, at first glance, to be more anti-Semitic than any other was first published in 1946 in the Quarterly Review of Literature:

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[28]Watson, p. 532.

a kike is the most dangerous
machine as yet invented
by even yankee ingenu
ity (out of a jew a few
dead dollars and some twisted laws)
it comes both prigged and canted

Cummings' care in word choice is evident in the distinction between jew and kike, one also notes the strange metaphor in the first two lines. It is obvious that a kike is manufactured; he is made, not born. And indeed, Cummings himself validates this interpretation, for he states that, though "in unpopular parlance a 'kike' equals a jew, for me 'a kike' equals an UNjew."[29] A "kike" is a machine, a product of Americanization and dehumanization; he is the "undead" result of dollar madness and "yankee ingenu/ity." Another poem employs dialect, puns, and forced rhyme to warn against "muckers pimps and tratesmen" and other unsavory characters.[30]

In contrast to these products of a culture which makes men into machines is Cummings' portrait of a little tailor who takes pride in his craftsmanship, whose work is his life, and whose soul is his own:

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[29]Norman, p. 344. This is a report of a conversation with Norman; Cummings continues: "Why? Because for me a jew is a human being; whereas 'a kike' is a machine--the product of that miscalled Americanization, alias standardization(id est dehumanization)which, from my viewpoint, makes out&out murder a respectable undertaking."

[30]"when muckers pimps and tratesmen," 1935.

.....one fearless
one good yes
completely kind
mindheart one true one generous child-
man
-god one eager
souldoll one
unsellable not buyable alive
one i say human being)...[31]

This "human being" is "not...one/goldberger"; his racial or religious origin is never mentioned, for this is not important. His accent is foreign, and he still has the old world respect for craftsmanship. This is important.

It would appear then, that Miss Sickels' charge is not quite just. Cummings' phonetic representation of dialogue is often clearly identifiable as Yiddish; he does indeed often identify "kikes," not Jews, "with intellectualism and commercialism." A poet living in New York City for as long as Cummings has would be singularly unobservant if he failed to note the large concentration of particular national groups in the area. It is probable that, if he lived elsewhere, his phonetic representation would include a Texas drawl, the peculiarities of Southern speech, or even the tones of the local "machine" in the Chamber of Commerce, whatever his national origin.

The Negroes in Cummings' work are dealt with much more sympathetically than are the "kikes," because the former are

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[31]"i say no world," 1940.

not products of mechanization; they just <u>are</u> themselves. What of the charge that Cummings hates Catholics? An early poem (1925) describing a street in a poor section of the city apparently refers to Catholic taboos:

> a blue woman with sticking out breasts hanging
> clothes. On the line, not so old
> for the mother of twelve undershirts (we are told
> by is it Bishop Taylor who needs hanging
>
> that marriage is a sure cure for masturbation).

Another poem of the same year compares the degree of sin and innocence of a prostitute and a priest:

> now dis "daughter" of eve (who aint precisely slim)sim
>
> ply don't know duh meanin uv duh woid sin in
> not disagreeable contras tuh dat not exacly fat
>
> "father" (adjustin his robe) who now puts on his flat hat

A year later, Cummings gives a vivid description of a procession which honored a relic--"the exhumed hand of St. Ignatz." Reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's "Triumphal March," it is, however, less detached from the observer:

> candles and
>
> Here Comes a glass box
> which the exhumed
> hand of Saint Ignatz miraculously
> inhabits. (people tumble
> down. people crumble to their
> knees. people
> begin crossing people)...
> .....
> (the crowd
> howls faintly
> blubbering pointing
> .....
> .....procession...
> Enters

this
    church.
toward which The
Expectant stutter (upon artificial limbs,
with faces like defunct geraniums)
(1926)

Eliot's poem described the ritual procession which honored the miracles of war; this one honors the miraculous hand of St. Ignatz. The brightness, the sensuous colors, and the sunlight all disappear as the procession goes into the church. Outside are the people, "with faces like defunct geraniums." Defunct is a word which Cummings uses rather often; the sound plus the relationship of the word to fungi add to the connotation.[32] The word implies more than death; it implies complete extinction, a dried-up husk. The effect of the relic on the people contributes to the impact of the word defunct. The people "tumble down" and "crumble to their knees." They are depicted as howling and blubbering.

In these poems, Cummings' comments appear to be directed toward Catholic dogma, the hypocrisy of the priest, and the calculated attempt to capitalize on the credulity of the people. This does not necessarily make him anti-Catholic; it does show him critical of any system which censors and proscribes for people instead of allowing them to make their own decisions and be individuals. It is the control and the hypocrisy and the lack of faith in the individual which

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[32]One of the most effective uses of defunct is in the poem "Buffalo Bill's/defunct"; it is an onomatopoetic word which signals the collapse of a legend.

Cummings scorns.

Nor does he particularly single out religious groups to comment on. His early poetry is typical of the youthful rebellion of many young men who see the sterility, the rationalizations, the hypocrisies, and the absurdities that are done in the name of religion. They substitute their own values for those values of orthodox religion which seem most corrupted. Cummings' early writing appears to follow this trend, and one can note a definite progression and increasing maturity in his attitude toward religions and religion. Using biblical language and an ironic approach, Cummings points out the puny efforts of man to bring the earth down to his level of understanding and consciousness and to produce the gods men feel they must have:

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee
,has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty .how
often have religions taken
thee upon their scraggy knees
squeezing and

buffeting thee that thou mightest conceive
gods
(but
true

to the incomparable
couch of death thy
rhythmic
lover

thou answerest

them only with

spring)

(1920)

The diction and the techniques characterize the sterile, dry, pinched Ichabods who have attempted to reduce life and nature to formulas. Alliteration of p's and g's spit out the poet's scorn. In contrast are the warmth and beauty and fertility of the earth which joins with the death of winter to produce, always, spring.

In keeping with Cummings' philosophy is the substitution of love or the act of love together with a hedonistic delight in the senses for the religion which he has impatiently discarded. Many of his early poems, however, echo biblical language; "Orientale" and "Amores" are couched in the diction of the "Song of Songs." Religious imagery and religious diction are used in poems which celebrate the act of love; a prostitute has "the eyes of the mother of/god";[33] another one is called the "little painted poem of god."[34] There appears to be an association between pagan gods and

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[33]"between nose-red gross," 1923.

[34]"when thou hast taken thy last applause," 1923.

lust ("god gloats upon Her stunning flesh."). The crucifix is mentioned in several poems, in one "a Jesus sags/in frolicsome wooden agony)."[35]

Sterility in religion, as in other areas, is noted by Cummings. He was quick to point out the reliance on comfort and ritual in Cambridge where the ladies appear to be neither selective in their interests nor very much alive:

> the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls
> are unbeautiful and have comfortable minds
> (also, with the church's protestant blessings
> daughters, unscented shapeless spirited)
> they believe in Christ and Longfellow, both dead,
> are invariably interested in so many things--
> at the present writing one still finds
> delighted fingers knitting for the is it Poles?
> perhaps. While permanent faces coyly bandy
> scandal of Mrs. N. and Professor D
> ....the Cambridge ladies do not care, above
> Cambridge if sometimes in its box of
> sky lavender and cornerless, the
> moon rattles like a fragment of angry candy.
>
> (1922)

The daughters have been created in the same image as their mothers; all are superficial and interested only in dead ideas; their activities comprise the creation of knitted things and the destruction of reputations. It is obvious that they believe in nothing alive. The moon even appears to conform to their notions of propriety and quantity at least in appearance, for it is boxed in lavender.

While Cummings deplores the sterile attitudes exemplified

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[35]"the bed is not very big," 1925.

in people who profess religion, he is not always patient toward some of those who act on their convictions. The description of the Salvation Army lass is not flattering:

> the skinny voice
>
> of the leatherfaced
> woman with the crimson
> nose and coquettishly-
> cocked bonnet

but neither is the following comment:

> the "Divine Average" who was
>
> attracted by the inspired
> sister's howling moves
> off
> will anyone tell him why he should
> blow two bits for the coming of Christ Jesus
> .....
> nix, kid
>
> (1922)

In opposition to accepted Christian rituals in religion is a poem which is an absurd combination of levels of diction and puns. The opening is a philosophical reflection on experiences and the passing of time, ending with Villon's nostalgic line which goes "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" The language then changes to the phonetic representation of the speech of a tough guy who recalls the major cities all over the world together with their material wealth: "...Lundun Burlin and gay Paree/...dictaphones/ wireless subways...." and then goes on to exclaim:

sall right in its way kiddo
but as fer i gimme de good ole daze....

in dem daze kid Christmas
meant sumpn youse knows wot
i refers ter Satter Nailyuh (comes but once er
year)i'll tell de woild one swell bangup
time wen nobody wore no cloze
and went runnin aroun wid eachudder Hell
Bent fer election makin believe dey was chust born[35]
(1926)

The poem is a wickedly delightful jab at the perennial recollector of the good old "daze"; it must have given Cummings much glee in his irreverently rebellious attitude toward orthodoxy, as in the tones of a pugilist, he revealed some of the very pagan origins of Christmas.

In another poem, in language not illiterate but colloquial, Cummings tells the Christmas story, getting down to basic essentials in details, shearing all the myth and romanticized aura that have accumulated for over 1900 years:

(and i imagine
never mind Joe agreeably cheerfully remarked when
surrounded by fat stupid animals
the jewess shrieked
the messiah tumbled successfully into the world
the animals continued eating. And i imagine she, and
heard them slobber and
in the darkness)

stood sharp angels with faces like Jim Europe
(1922)

Friedman's statement that the language in the poem is a typically Unitarian treatment of Christianity is

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[35]"even if all desires things moments be."

questionable.[37] Josephson indicated that Cummings was in rebellion against his father's puritan-Unitarian values, and certainly the attitude expressed in the poem is typical of the first rebellion against orthodoxy, together with a desire to shock, an attitude which is notable among many new Unitarians. It is surprising that it should still be a part of Cummings' make-up at this late date. As a result, the poem is ruthlessly anti-sentimental; it is also a poem which seems to lack affirmation. With increasing maturity, Cummings realized his affinity for the ethics of Jesus, and like Shelley, who was also at first almost petulantly critical of Jesus, Cummings too became a disciple, not a critic.[38]

Meanwhile, however, he noted what was being done in the name of religion as well as in other areas in which one would normally expect ethics to be important. Published in the same issue of Secession were "a man who had fallen among thieves," "the season 'tis, my lovely lambs," and "this evangelist." The second one has already been treated as a

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[37] Friedman, p. 84.

[38] "Nonlecture Four" includes a reading from the Sermon on the Mount which is prefaced by the following remark: "Most of you are no doubt acquainted with this more than most famous manifestation of whatever I can only call feeling--as against unfeeling: alias knowing and believing and thinking--this masterpoem of human perception, whose seventh verse alone exterminates all conventional morality." The seventh verse reads: "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Six Nonlectures, p. 67.

satiric commentary on the hypocrisy and greed of those who profited from the war effort and those who attempted to maintain censorship in as many areas as possible. Two of the other poems are in interesting contrast to each other.

The poem "this evangelist" with its four main stanzas, each followed by a terse single line statement, is a commentary on representative types in religion, journalism, sports, and politics. The diction throughout has extremely unpleasant connotations, all of which lead to a final tercet which places all the types at the same level and yet in contrast with the last speaker who at least is honest even though crude and illiterate. The poem itself is strikingly unified in imagery, particularly with the emphasis on fingers, hands, and fists:

> this evangelist
> buttons with his big gollywog voice
> the kingdom of heaven up behind and crazily
> skating thither and hither in filthy sawdust
> chucks and rolls
> against the tent his thick joggling fists
>
> he is persuasive

The evangelist is a grotesque, not only because he is likened to a gollywog but also because he assumes he has final answers. The choice of words is distinctly sexual and indicates that the evangelical fanaticism is a substitution for, or a perversion of, normal sexual drives. The force of the actions is maniacal in its intensity.[39]

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[39]Eric Partridge in A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English defines chucks: "to be sexually desirous; to move about quickly." Skate as a noun means a depraved person.

The editor in the second stanza is also a grotesque; he is as evil and malicious as a hobgoblin:

> the editor cigarstinking hobgoblin swims
> upward in his swivelchair one fist dangling scandal while
> five other fingers snitch
> rapidly through mist a defunct king as
>
> linotypes gobblehobble

The editor dangles scandal from one fist while he searches through mist for more. The verb snitch has particularly unpleasant connotations on several levels: it implies tattling, stealing, and seizing, particularly information. It also denotes a contemptible or disreputable person. The result is evident in the image of the linotype which takes on the unholy characteristics of the editor.

The third stanza deals with a favorite American sport:

> our lightheavy twic twic ingly attacks
> landing a onetwo
> which doubles up suddenly his bunged hinging
> victim against the
> giving ropes amid
> screams of deeply bulging thousands
>
> i too omit one kelly

The lightheavy weight lands the final blows on his victim who is already bruised and battered, possibly with his eyes half-closed, folded on the ropes--all to the screaming applause of thousands. The poet sardonically refuses to throw his hat, or kelly, into the ring.

Cummings shows no mercy to those in high position, especially politicians; in a few terse words he characterizes

the politician and concludes the poem:

> in response to howjedooze the candidate's new silk
> lid bounces gently from his baldness
> a smile masturbates softly in the vacant
> lot of his physiognomy
> his scientifically pressed trousers ejaculate spats
>
> a strikingly succulent getup
>
> but
> we knew a muffhunter and he said to us Kid.
> daze nutn like it.

The terminology makes a sexual interpretation mandatory. One can consider the first four characters in this poem as perverting their natural energies in religious fervor, salacious gossip, sadistic brutality, and onanistic or prostitutional politics. The sardonic comments express the speaker's contempt for the substitution of the natural for the artificial or debasing. Cummings had a wide knowledge of slang terms, particularly of a sexual nature. In addition, the use of the onomatopoetic words twic and twoc in the third stanza imitate the sounds of the blows "onetwo" as well as parallel the parts of the word lightheavy. There is a hollow sound about them, as there is about the victory, if victory one could call it.

That Cummings should open this poem with religious imagery is surely significant. Since the characters are all subverting their natural impulses into brutal and degrading channels, the poem may be a criticism of the puritanical attitude toward sex, but it is more likely to be an indictment

of those who are not true to themselves, as well as an attempt to show the unnatural and ugly results. They are all grotesques, including the screaming, "deeply bulging thousands."

In striking contrast to the destructive tendencies manifested in this poem is Cummings' adaptation of the Good Samaritan story. His version is not particularly pretty, but then neither was the twentieth century at the end of World War I. The poem has to do with a man who had had an "emancipated evening" and who was now lying beside the roadside, "endowed... with a changeless grin." A dozen "staunch and leal/citizens did graze at pause," but, like the priest and the Levite, went on about their business after gazing upon him:

> swaddled with a frozen brook
> of pinkest vomit out of eyes
> which noticed nobody he looked
> as if he did not care to rise

The speaker, however, does not pass by on the other side:

> Brushing from whom the stiffened puke
> i put him all into my arms
> and staggered banged with terror through
> a million billion trillion stars.[40]
>
> (1923)

The last two lines are a striking combination of sensory images and kinesthetic responses which make up an overpowering emotion. In contrast with the kine-like quality of the citizens who neither know their neighbor nor move to help him is the affirmation of the speaker, the concern of

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[40] "a man who had fallen among thieves."

one individual for the humanity of another. One is reminded again of Cummings' reference to the Sermon on the Mount.

A later poem on religion might almost be an epitaph written for the death of God. The only word missing is cogito; it may possibly be the subject of the poem, the villain in the piece:

> the Noster was a ship of swank
> (as gallant as they come)
> until she hit a mine and sank
> just off the coast of Sum
>
> precisely where a craft of cost
> the Ergo perished later
> all hands (you may recall) being lost
> including captain Pater
>
> (1940)

The poem is a play on words of two opposing phrases. The end result is the loss of God and the destruction of man.

The transcendentalist philosophy maintained that there was something beyond man, something which man tried to reach or to achieve. A belief in something greater than man must of necessity turn man's gaze beyond himself; he is less likely to be so exclusively concerned with his neuroses and with designing creature comforts to the detriment of his spiritual being. Cummings was a poet who was in the transcendentalist tradition; in many ways he is an old fashioned moralist. His moralism was not limited by conventional standards, however, and such infringements on freedom as the blue laws, together with the narrowness of the Puritan outlook especially toward joy and love, were targets for Cummings' satire.

Remnants of Puritanism together with the new dogmas of science which constituted the religion of the twentieth century were no more acceptable to Cummings. He appears to have thrown out all traditional values at first and then accepted slowly those which seemed to him of worth; the growth of his philosophy is apparent if one compares his early poetry with his later work. When there are either/or alternatives, there is no real freedom to find one's own values.

For Cummings, that which was sacred was the growth of the individual as he realized his potential. Freedom was the primary requisite for such growth; in learning to respect oneself, one would learn to respect others. This is the only program that Cummings could endorse or follow. His belief in democracy was based on respect for the individual; but he was also a realist, for he saw that most people could not bear to be individuals. They would rather be someone else. To these people he could give neither respect nor love, for he despised a coward who would sacrifice his integrity for security. Much of his poetry criticized those aspects of society which he found reprehensible, but by their very nature, most of his poems suggest the alternative to such aspects. Most of the rest of his poetry is pure affirmation--of love, of life, of joy and wonder. Much of his early work was infused with a missionary zeal which he sought to shock

people or to change their way of thinking. He realized the adolescence of the former and the futility of the latter; and his later work is largely a personal expression of his own beliefs and affirmations. Thus his lyrics have a quality which encompasses sight, sound, touch, and rhythm and which achieve the effect of the spirit breaking out of the body which imprisons it. It was then that he became a follower of his own teachings. He concentrated upon living his life to the fullest, in deepening his awareness and appreciation of the simple things which were also the beautiful, in reaffirming each day his individuality.

CHAPTER FIVE

E. E. CUMMINGS, AFFIRMATIONS

"there's nothing as something as one"[1]

A chronological reading of Cummings' poems reveals the similarity in themes and ideas in his early and his late work. As a social critic, he satirized war, hypocrisy, materialism, greed, the uses to which science was put, and the increasing pressure on the individual to conform to society's demands. Cummings spoke early with a prophetic voice. Considerably before Huxley's Brave New World he could see the results of mass production and consumption with their inevitable dehumanization of the individual.

There is, however, considerable variation in the expression of his ideas over the years. His earliest poetry was rather traditional, both in subject matter and expression; the language was often archaic, the style Biblical. During the twenties and thirties in particular, those poems which criticized society were often couched in shrill invective. They were sometimes less poetry than soapbox oratory. Often his language was pretentious and brashly overdone; sometimes the typography interfered with the meaning.

In later years, Cummings has been more orthodox in

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[1] "if everything happens that can't be done," 1943.

his typography, less experimental in punctuation. His originality has incorporated spatial arrangement of words to capture the intensity and sensory awareness of any given moment or experience. Subordination of technique has made the difference between being a deliberate non-conformist and a real individual. The difference in tone and control is evident when one compares some of the early, explosively savage vituperation hurled at whomever he was criticizing, with the stark and haunting declaration about man which is found in such a poem as "this is a rubbish of human rind." There is also less use of dialect; there are fewer examples of low level puns in Cummings' later work.

As his attitudes matured, the lyrical quality of Cummings' poetry became more pronounced; even his satire was usually lyrical. He became less abusive in diction, less a critic of social aberrations (except when war recurred or when something truly monstrous happened) and more a poet of affirmation. This does not mean that he complacently accepted the standards of "mostpeople"; it may mean he realized that his antipathy to the idea of a program which would improve people was at variance with his criticism of them. First, last, and always, one must be an individual; one can only point out the idiosyncrasies and the hypocrisies that exist; one cannot force or coerce people into believing in or following one's own ideals. To truly be an individual in a

world which attempts to shackle one with conformity is to set an example which may inspire and encourage others. To be oneself is to deepen one's affirmation for the simple but meaningful; it is also to look not with negation, but for the unique qualities in others. Thus, many of Cummings' latest poems are sketches which capture the essence of some person who has, in his own simple way, affirmed the value of life.

Cummings' development as a rebel against social mores, traditional religion, and accepted American values in each case follows a similar pattern. In his early poetry, he celebrated in deliberately shocking language the bawdy, the prostitutes, the "lost ladies in league with death."[2] For him love often appeared to be equated with sex. That he had even then a human feeling for the derelicts or cast-offs of life is evident; his concern, however, is covered with a tough, hard exterior which speaks out of the corner of its mouth. It is interesting that even as early as 1917, the young Cummings already had an understanding of the real meaning of love, or the ideal of love, a universal love which transcends man himself. His poem "it may not always be so" is one of his most beautiful and moving. First printed in Eight Harvard Poets, it was reprinted under "Sonnets-Unrealities" in his first book, Tulips and Chimneys (1923).

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[2]Friedman, p. 42.

Cummings' acknowledgement of the real and the ideal is evident:

> it may not always be so; and i say
> that if your lips, which i have loved, should touch
> another's, and your dear strong fingers clutch
> his heart, as mine in time not far away;
> if on another's face your sweet hair lay
> in such a silence as i know, or such
> great writhing words as, uttering overmuch,
> stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;
>
> if this should be, i say if this should be--
> you of my heart, send me a little word;
> that i may go unto him, and take his hands,
> saying, Accept all happiness from me.
> Then shall i turn my face, and hear one bird
> sing terribly afar in the lost lands.

The death of self in a love which goes beyond consideration of one's own needs is love in its truest sense. It is close to Shelly's idea of consentaneous love and partakes of the divine.

In 1953, in his final "Nonlecture" Cummings reaffirms his belief in the existence and the power of love: "I am someone who proudly and humbly affirms that love is the mystery-of-mysteries...."[3] The mysteries of life are found in the miracles of birth, of life, of love: "...for me--personality is a mystery; ...mysteries alone are significant; and...love is the mystery-of-mysteries who creates them all."[4]

Illustrating "a naturally and miraculously whole human

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[3] Six Nonlectures, p. 110.

[4] Ibid., p. 43.

being...whose only happiness is to transcend himself, whose every agony is to grow"[5] is a poem which reflects on the power, the affirmation, the freedom which must be inherent in love:

> nothing false and possible is love
> (who's imagined, therefore limitless)
> love's to giving as to keeping's give;
> as yes is to if, love is to yes
>
> must's a schoolroom in the month of may:
> life's the deathboard where all now turns when
> (love's a universe beyond obey
> or common, reality or un-)
>
> proudly depths above why's first because
> (faith's last doubt and humbly heights below)
> kneeling, we--true lovers--pray that us
> will ourselves continue to outgrow
>
> all whose mosts if you have known and i've
> only we our least begin to guess
>
> (1944)

Here love is equated with imagination and, therefore, art. There can be no boundaries; there can be no laws or restrictions for anyone in these realms, for in order to fulfill one's potential, he must be free. The poem, a paeanof affirmation, rises to heights unlimited through Cummings' vocabulary. Who, why, yes, give, love, now overpower the negation of keeping, if, must, because, when and un. Thus the greatest quality that man can have, his ability to love, is the ultimate in his condition as a free individual.

Cummings has been called a sentimentalist and a romantic

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[5]Ibid., p. 111.

In the typical American understanding of love, he would be a visionary, a thoroughly impractical dreamer. And yet, says Cummings, we who have been taught to hate, who suspect anyone who tries to universalize the human condition even to include any of our current "enemies," have never tried the way of love. First we have been taught to hate ourselves, and after that we are incapable of loving others. The sickness of mankind is largely due to the distortion of his natural feelings; and hate, which is love denied, is triumphant. The inevitable corrosion of feeling and the loss of humane qualities are responsible for the madness and folly of our actions. The mysticism of Cummings' view is closer to Eastern thought than it is to Western philosophy; in the loss of self, one finds what is meaningful ("all lose whole find"). It was through self-discovery that he gained the faith a rebel must have: belief that he knows more than those in power.

And always, in Cummings, there is the insistence on feeling above reason. Called an anti-intellectual, he demonstrated a facile and far-reaching mind in his allusions to literature of all periods, to painters and philosophers. While his poems may have the effect of "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," they were carefully worked out in a highly intellectualized and artistic fashion.[6] Intellect

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[6]See Friedman, "Creation," pp. 126-158.

was used as a tool to express the living quality of emotion in his poetry; he refused to be cowed by scientists and logical positivists who would discount and discredit what they could not analyze in a test tube. A poem which illustrates his philosophy is the following:

> life is more true than reason will deceive
> (more secret or than madness did reveal)
> deeper is life than lose: higher than have
> --but beauty is more each than living's all
>
> multiplied with infinity sans if
> the mightiest meditations of mankind
> cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
> (beyond whose nearness there is no beyond)
>
> or does some littler bird than eyes can learn
> look up to silence and completely sing?
> futures are obsolete; pasts are unborn
> (here less than nothing's more than everything)
>
> death, as men call him, ends what they call men
> --but beauty is more now than dying's when
>
> (1943)

Here the miracle of life, the immortality of beauty are living affirmations which transcend men's most lofty thoughts. The necessity to <u>live</u> in the present, excluding thoughts of the past and the future, is of the greatest significance. There is none of the connotation of <u>carpe diem</u> in the usual sense; the poem is an adjuration to hold fast to the simple and the beautiful in time's fleeting moments; in its stress on the immortality of beauty, it is close to poems of Keats and Wallace Stevens.

A comparison of his later poems with, for example "The Mind's(" reveals the changing attitude, the mellowing,

the increasing lyricism of the later Cummings. Such poems as "anyone lived in a pretty how town," "yes is a pleasant country," darling! because my blood can sing," sweet spring is your," date from 1940 and later, and all celebrate the joy and healing power of love. In 95 Poems (1958) all but a handful are poems of affirmation. The mind is no longer belabored; it has been transcended:

> a billion brains may coax undeath
> from fancies fact and spaceful time--
> no heart can leap, no soul can breathe
> but by the sizeless truth of a dream
> whose sleep is the sky and the earth and the sea.
> For love are in you am in i are in we[7]

Paradoxically enough, this poet who has been called anti-intellectual has also been praised for being precisely the opposite. Reviewing Six Nonlectures, Alfred Kazin writes:

> And charming and touching as he is in this little autobiography he remains incurably sentimental. This sentimentality, I hasten to add, is not in his values, in his dislike of collectivism, in rousing sense of human freedom; it is in his actuality, with love for the living. The greatness of the New England transcendentalists was their ability to reclaim, from the commonsensical despairs of a dying religion, faith in the visionary powers of the mind.[8]

The religion might be dying, but Cummings had discovered some values beneath the facade. In Six Nonlectures Cummings refers to "these two wonderful human beings, my father and

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[7] "the great advantage of being alive," 1950.

[8] E. E. Cummings and His Fathers," The Inmost Leaf (New York, 1955), p. 196.

my mother, [who] loved each other more than themselves."[9] The poem which celebrates his mother is charming ("if there any heavens my mother will (all by herself) have"); but the poem in praise of his father is the highest accolade any son could pay a father. Two stanzas will illustrate its spirit and lyricism:

> joy was his song and joy so pure
> a heart of star by him could steer
> and pure so now and now so yes
> the wrists of twilight would rejoice
> .....
> and nothing quite so least as truth
> --i say though hate were why men breathe-
> because my father lived his soul
> love is the whole and more than all[10]

His later poems reveal a deepening awareness of and sympathy for human suffering. This is particularly evident in the poems about Joe Gould, a Harvard graduate, self-styled "Last of the Bohemians," writer, panhandler, and barfly. Although in his earlier period[11] Cummings was occasionally wittily cruel at Gould's expense, he shows new awareness and insight in a poem which was written after Cummings had been out for a walk and had seen "'a little person who now is dead and who lived by begging.' He had known this man well, but now he suddenly saw him as 'someone else.'"[12] His

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[9] See p. 10.

[10] "my father moved through dooms of love," 1940.

[11] See Josephson, p. 91.

[12] Norman, p. 188.

recognition of Gould's essential loneliness is correlated with that of Jesus; the result was a poem which has a haunting quality that is hard to define:

no time ago
or else a life
walking in the dark
i met christ

jesus) my heart
flopped over
and lay still
while he passed(as

close as i'm to you
yes closer
made of nothing
except loneliness
(1950)

The poem creates a mysterious aura about space and time, both of which have an illusory and elusive quality. Cummings' earlier, external attitude of irreverence toward Jesus has changed to awareness of the affinity of one deeply religious person for another. It is fitting that from this lost, rather pathetic derelict should emanate a kind of loneliness which would remind Cummings of Jesus. The incident and the poem are reminiscent of a passage in The Enormous Room in which Cummings is being taken on foot in the darkness to the prison camp. In a small grove of trees, he saw a little wooden man: "there was in this complete silent doll a gruesome truth of instinct, a success of uncanny poignancy, an unearthly ferocity of rectangular emotion."[13] There is

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[13]The Enormous Room, p. 53.

the same underlying awareness of feeling for what the wooden French crucifix represented; during the twenties, however, religion was debunked along with everything else. The change in Cummings' external attitude is indicative of the surety he learned to trust about his own beliefs and feelings. It is the omnipresence of "nothing except loneliness" which makes for the universality of the poem.

Together with his acknowledged appreciation for the ethics of Jesus, Cummings' realization of the miracle of birth and life and love are equated with a new awareness of God. This awareness, particularly in comparison with modern man's new gods, science and religion, is the impetus for the following paraphrase of Milton:

> when any mortal(even the most odd)
> can justify the ways of man to God
> i'll think it strange that normal mortals can
> not justify the ways of God to man[14]
> (1958)

What is needed today, says Cummings is a little innocence:

> but the proud power of himself death immense
> is not so as a little innocence[15]

His utter lack of fear of death is strikingly apparent throughout his work; it is in startling contrast, for example, with Hemingway's obsession with death. Cummings'

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[14] #59, 95 Poems.

[15] "who were so dark of heart they might not speak," 1945.

acceptance of life as a whole, his view of dying as an inevitable part of life is evidence of the strength, maturity, and harmony of his philosophy. Far worse than dying is the state of "undeath." In re-reading the essays published in Miscellany, Cummings wrote about them and himself thus:

> He's cheered because, while re-reading them, I've encountered a great deal of liveliness and nothing dead. Last but not least; he's enlightened via the realization that, whereas times can merely change, an individual may grow.[16]

The poetic expression of this realization of his growth is nowhere more explicit or lyrical than in a poem which proclaims Cummings as a religious poet:

> i thank You God for most this amazing
> day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
> and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
> which is natural which is infinite which is yes
>
> (i who have died am alive again today,
> and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
> day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay
> great happening illimitably earth)
>
> how should tasting touching hearing seeing
> breathing any-lifted from the no
> of all nothing--human merely being
> doubt unimaginable You?
>
> (now the ears of my ears awake and
> now the eyes of my eyes are opened)
>
> (1948)

All the senses combine in this antiphon in a joyful and wondering acknowledgement of a new awareness, a rebirth into a state of harmonious oneness with the universe.

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[16]"Foreward," Miscellany, xi.

CONCLUSION

Through his poetry, Cummings achieved self-discovery; through self-discovery he developed a strong and sustaining belief in his own innate feeling for what was most valuable in life. As a gadfly, he tried to alert a complacent public to the nightmare the American dream was becoming. His methods varied throughout his career although his major premise did not: he was a moralist who preached the doctrine of the individual. He was a conservative who scorned collective answers or solutions to the problems an individual must face.

Meeting them on their own terms, Cummings exposed the hypocrisy and greed that lurked behind the facade that "mostpeople" had erected. His terminology aroused a shocked response in the Puritan-indoctrinated, much as the "Divine Average" today responds to Catcher in the Rye. Burying separate and collective heads in the sand is one solution to the problems brought about by urban living, industrialization, technological advances, and population explosion. It was not Cummings' way.

Accepting security and "progress" as defined in terms of gadgets, mass "entertainment," row houses, and planned obsolescence, instead of fulfilling oneself as an individual--all this was to Cummings a violation of the integrity of the human spirit. Values which center in mass-produced products

make people insensitive to the deepest needs of themselves and others. Acceptance of finished products as a goal guarantees the automatic cessation of growth in an individual. Contrary to Faulkner's analysis, it is not only the fear of being blown up which is responsible for our lack of concern about problems of the spirit; it is also that mankind, the "pseudo-beast" no longer has a heart. He is nothing more than a mass of glands responding automatically to the stimulus of advertising, slogans from all sources, and pressure groups. Mass "thinking" and mass conformity are the results of the individual's abdication from responsibility for his actions in his private life and in his role as a citizen. The gray, grubby horror of Nineteen Eighty-Four is an inevitable projection of such apathy.

Much of Cummings' criticism was directed toward a society which clasped Freud and other "knowledge salesmen" to its collective chest. He deplored the substitution of scientific dogma for universal verities as he censured the prostitution of science to meet the goals of comfort and motivation of the human being in order to guarantee economic security. He also denounced with indignation and horror acceptance of the idea of "military necessity" not only for the loss of life and limb and for the psychological traumas which are the inevitable by-products of war, but for the basic loss of dignity and worth which make for a human being.

The spiritual death which is the result of forcing a man to kill another man is even worse than actual death.

Even though there is less social criticism in Cummings' later work, World War II and the Hungarian uprising brought out the same intense reaction that he had expressed in his poetry and prose following World War I. His wrath was kindled as he saw again the hypocrisy of a people who can be trained to think that "killing is an act of Christian love"; one notes the despair he felt as he saw the recurrence of the old pattern: "all ignorance toboggans into know." War is the ultimate violation of the human spirit; when it occurs, the sensitive person must cry out against it.

There are undoubtedly a number of reasons for there being less criticism and more affirmation in Cummings' later work. The realization of the perversity of human nature as it chooses sloth and comfort at whatever cost to itself and others may well have inclined him to agree with Swift's views on "that animal man." Expecting more than "2 1/2 or impossibly 3" individuals over a period of centuries is, he concluded, an absurdity. Man's salvation, then, is an individual one; one person living up to his convictions can be a power greater than science can produce, just as the opening of a leaf can defy the analysis of the greatest scientist or philosopher.

Cummings' philosophy was rooted in his Transcendentalist heritage and was based on the dignity and worth of the individual. Maintaining his own integrity, this one "alive individual" took his destiny in his own hands, faced life and death without fear and with affirmation. One can ask no more of anyone.

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